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requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy

in Philosophy

It is entitled "Bridging the Gulf between Freedom and
Nature in Kant's Critique of Judgment"

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Bridging the Gulf Between Freedom and Nature In Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

**A dissertation submitted to the
Division of Research and Advanced Studies
of the University of Cincinnati**

**in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.)**

**in the Department of Philosophy
of the College of Arts and Sciences**

2000

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This dissertation is a study of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that focuses on various analogies Kant draws in that work between aesthetic judgment and moral judgment. The aim of the dissertation is to elucidate the role of these analogies in Kant's project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature. The main arguments of the dissertation are that the gulf between freedom and nature announced in the introduction to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is best understood as a gulf from the point of view of feeling, and that Kant holds that aesthetic judgment helps us to reflectively bridge this gulf in a wide variety of ways.

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Bridging the Gulf between Freedom and Nature in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

I. The Problem about Freedom and Nature in Kant's Third *Critique*

In the two versions of his introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant refers repeatedly to a “great gulf” that separates the “realm of the concept of freedom” from the “realm of the concept of nature; a gulf that, for Kant, can only be bridged by the faculty of judgment (§2,176). Thus, for Kant, the faculty of judgment performs a “mediating” function between the faculties of the understanding and of reason.

As Paul Guyer has observed, however, before we can appreciate Kant's purported solution to the problem about freedom and nature we need to take a careful look at just what that problem is supposed to be. According to Guyer, since any problem about the compatibility of freedom and nature was solved in the resolution of the third antinomy of the first *Critique*, and by the doctrine of the primacy of practical reason in the second *Critique*, Kant must have something else in mind when, in the third *Critique*, he speaks of a problematic gulf between freedom and nature. Guyer goes on to suggest that Kant's real concern in the third *Critique* must be to bridge another kind of gulf between freedom and nature; a gulf between *feeling* and freedom. As Guyer puts it, there is in Kant's view a gulf “between the arbitrary realm of sensation and the law governed autonomy of freedom.”¹

¹ Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.27.

Guyer argues that there are two problems about the relation between feeling and freedom that Kant addresses in the *Critique of Judgment*. The first problem is that our emotions, which, for Kant, have their source in the sensible side of our nature, are often at odds with what the moral law demands of us as rational beings. And though, for Kant, morality can never be based on sentiment, neither can we hope to attain “moral perfection” if we do not cultivate within ourselves a predisposition to love the good with our “whole selves.” Thus any attempt to become “morally perfect” will involve the development of “moral feeling.” That is, the development in ourselves of feelings that support, rather than hinder, the ends of morality.

The second problem concerns our ability to comprehend moral ideas. Moral ideas, for Kant, are, strictly speaking, not representable. Like all ideas, moral ideas contain conceptually more than can be represented intuitively. As Kant puts it in the first *Critique*, ideas are “necessary concepts of reason to which no corresponding object can be given in sense experience” (A327/B384). But, as Guyer points out, Kant also holds that we are the kinds of creatures who need representations to “...verify the reality of our concepts” (§59,351). More specifically, we need intuitive representations of moral concepts which can not be directly represented because they are concepts of pure practical reason (ideas).

As Guyer observes, Kant’s solution to the first problem will involve significant developments in his moral psychology, while his solution to the second problem makes important contributions to his moral epistemology. In the first case, Kant’s third *Critique* account of the way in which one’s disinterested feeling for the beautiful and the sublime (especially in nature) may aid the development of one’s moral feelings underscores his

growing conviction that moral perfection requires the cultivation of moral feeling. In the second case, Kant's theory that aesthetic experience supplies us with symbolic representations of moral ideas shows how our experiences of the sublime and the beautiful help us in our attempt to ascertain to what extent the realms of freedom and nature can be regarded as harmonious.

In what follows, I will assume that Guyer is right in his claim that the problem about freedom and nature that Kant addresses in the third *Critique* is best understood as a problem about feeling and freedom. I also think that it is quite right to say that the third *Critique* makes important contributions to Kant's moral psychology and moral epistemology. What I would like to add to Guyer's interpretation of the third *Critique* gulf between freedom and nature is the observation that, in addition to being a problem about a gulf between feeling and freedom, the gulf Kant is referring to is also a felt gulf. That is, besides being a gulf in Kant's systematic account of the cognitive faculties, the third *Critique* gulf between freedom and nature is a gulf from the point of view of feeling. Kant's worry, or part of it, is that we *feel that* freedom and nature are irreconcilable even if we know that, in theory, they are at least not incompatible. More specifically, Kant is concerned to address a specific kind of despair about the possibility of realizing the final end of morality in nature.

As I read Kant, a preliminary formulation of the problem might look something like the following. The moral law, or more specifically, the highest good, which for Kant is the ultimate goal towards which morality works, is meant to be realized in nature; but we have no guarantee that nature will prove hospitable to the ends of morality. Indeed, there seems to be much evidence to the contrary; internal nature (sensibility) is frequently

in conflict with what the moral law demands of us as individuals, nature does not seem to favor the fulfillment of human ends over those of other kinds of creatures, and, though our rationality seems to set us apart from the rest of nature, we are nonetheless just as subject to the destructive power of nature as are other kinds of animals (§83,430). From the point of view of our existence as an animal species, then, we don't appear to be entitled to regard ourselves as a final end of nature. But if we are not especially favored by nature, on what are we to base our hope that nature will prove receptive to our moral goals?

For Kant, the felt gulf between freedom and nature is a quite natural response to a survey of the evidence for the possibility that nature will prove receptive to our moral ends. On the whole, Kant recognizes, the evidence suggests that nature is designed to frustrate rather than further our moral projects. As Kant puts it, "...so far from making man, regarded as one of the many animal species, an ultimate end, nature has no more exempted him from its destructive than from its productive forces, nor has it made the smallest exception to its subjection of everything to a mechanism of forces devoid of an end" (§82,427). Even worse, we seem to be impelled by nature to subvert our own best purposes. This is a notion that Kant will develop further in *Religion within the Realm of Reason Alone*. In that work, Kant speaks of a radical evil in human nature, a "propensity" to do evil rather than good that affects us as a species (*Religion*, 6:25). Again the question becomes, what entitles us to so much as hope for an ultimate harmony between

freedom and nature given what experience shows us about both external and internal nature?²

II. The Case of Spinoza

Kant does not spell out the problem about freedom and nature in the introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* the way I have here. Instead, he seems most concerned there with the problem of the completion of his systematic account of our cognitive powers. Kant evidently felt that his account of the power of judgment, and especially his identification of the principle of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties as the guiding principle of that faculty, solved some remaining problems in the Critical philosophy. Kant's two introductions to the third *Critique* reflect these worries about the systematicity of his philosophy, and this is the aspect of Kant's problem that most commentators have concerned themselves with.

In the concluding sections of the third *Critique*, Kant highlights what I will call the 'anthropological' dimension of the gulf between freedom and nature. By 'anthropology' Kant means "a systematic doctrine containing our knowledge of man" (*Anthropology*, 119). As such, anthropology takes one of two forms. Either it has to do with the physiological make-up of human beings, or it raises the question of what "...man

² It must be stressed that, for Kant, practical reason is "self sufficient." From the point of view of morality we are not in need of any confirmation from nature regarding the possibility of achieving our moral ends. Thus in the "Critique of Teleological Judgment" Kant both reaffirms the postulates of practical thought discussed in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and argues for the self-sufficiency of these postulates. Kant makes this point clear by describing a situation in which rational beings were situated in a natural environment that gave no sign whatsoever of purposiveness, and then arguing that even in this case a rational being would be capable of regarding itself, and more specifically its rationality, as the final end of nature (§91,479).

can, or should, make of himself as a freely acting being” (*Anthropology*, 119). Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, though it falls short of being the kind of systematic account Kant seems to have had in mind in his definition of anthropology, contains a series of observations designed to give us a picture of “man as a citizen of the world.” Additionally, in his *Logic*, Kant offers the following summary of the tasks of philosophy.

The field ... of philosophy may be summed up in the following questions: 1) What can I know? 2) What ought I to do? 3) What may I hope? 4) What is man? The first question is answered by metaphysics, the second by morality, the third by religion, and the fourth by anthropology. At bottom, all this could be reckoned to be anthropology, because the first three questions are related to the last.

The problem about freedom and nature Kant poses in the third *Critique* is an anthropological question, in his sense, in that it asks how the goal of morality, the highest vocation of humanity, can be reconciled with what appears to be the actual situation of the human species in nature. There is also an obvious sense in which the third *Critique* problem about freedom and nature addresses Kant’s third question (above), in that it is fundamentally a question of what we may rationally hope concerning the possibility of realizing the goal of morality in nature. This suggests that, for Kant, the problem about freedom and nature is far from a merely abstract philosophical problem. Instead, it is a problem affecting the psychology of the individually existing moral agent.

In §87, the topic of which is his moral proof for the existence of God, Kant asks us to consider the following case.

Let us then, as we may, take the case of a righteous man, such, say, as Spinoza, who considers himself firmly persuaded that there is no God and—since in respect of the Object of morality a similar result ensues—no future life either. How will he estimate his individual intrinsic finality that is derived from the moral law which he reveres in practice? He does not require that its pursuit should bring him any personal benefit either in this or any other world. On the contrary his will is disinterestedly to establish only that good to which the holy law directs all his energies. But he is circumscribed in his endeavor. He may, it is true, expect to find a chance concurrence now and again, but he can never find in nature a uniform agreement- a consistent agreement according to fixed rules, answering to what his maxims are and must be subjectively, with that end which yet he feels himself obliged to urge and realize (§87, 452)

The problem confronting Spinoza is that he is led by both the inadequacy of all speculative proofs for the existence of God, and “by the number of irregularities he finds in nature and the moral world,” to conclude that there is no God (§87,452). Kant’s solution to the problem is a “rational faith” in the existence of a moral God. A ‘Spinoza’ like individual, Kant here suggests, will be subject to such despair at the seeming contingency of nature, and especially at the plight of the just person in the world, that he or she will be led to abandon, first, belief in God as moral lawgiver, and, ultimately, the pursuit of the moral law demanded by reason. In its context, the case of ‘Spinoza’ is meant to persuade us of the necessity of “assuming the existence of a moral author of the world” if we are not to succumb to despair regarding the possibility of realizing the final end prescribed to us by the moral law (§87,453). As such, Kant’s solution to the problem of Spinoza is just a restatement of his conclusion in the second *Critique* that the existence of God is postulated as necessary from the point of view of practical thought (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:125).

Kant’s third *Critique* treatment of the case of the Spinoza-like individual who is committed to the cause of morality, but who is also convinced that the universe

does not favor the cause of morality, besides being full of implications for Kant's moral philosophy and philosophy of religion, is interesting for the light it sheds on the third *Critique's* problem of the gulf between freedom and nature. The problem faced by Kant's Spinoza is essentially the same problem that is generalized in the introduction as the gulf between freedom and nature, but with an added theological emphasis. What the Spinoza case shows is that, for Kant, neither theoretical nor practical reason on their own are sufficient to ward off despair regarding the possibility of realizing the goal of morality. For Kant, even a morally upright, and speculatively inclined, individual who attempts to take stock of the place of humankind in the universe from a purely rational point of view, but lacking a belief in God as the moral author of the world, may conclude that the final end of morality is not realizable in nature. Even more, Kant claims that such an individual will be likely to abandon morality itself as a hopeless cause.

Kant's solution to "Spinoza's" problem is the assumption of God as the moral author of the universe "...for the purpose of framing a conception of the possibility of the final end morally prescribed to him" (§87,452). Is this, then, Kant's solution to the problem about freedom and nature as well? Although at times this does appear to be Kant's solution to the problem about freedom and nature, I think it is better regarded as the hard won culmination of a complex chain of reflections, aesthetic and teleological, centered on the problem of how to reconcile the demands of morality with the wholly mechanistic conception of nature supplied by the understanding. The assumption of God as the moral author of the world, one of Kant's "postulates of practical thought," is presented in the third *Critique* as the result of a series of reflections, both aesthetic and teleological, concerning the possibility of realizing the final end of morality in nature.

More specifically, it is connected to the conception of a nature so designed that the final end of nature is the appearance of human freedom with its ends.

But the moral proof for the existence of God is not very persuasive on its own as a solution to the problem about freedom and nature because, as of the second *Critique*, Kant had not explained how the postulates of practical thought, including the postulate that there is a moral designer of the universe, can be incorporated into the life of the mind of creatures who “need representations to verify the reality of their concepts.” Kant’s moral proof for the existence of God is simply unpersuasive lacking a more detailed account of the way in which moral ideas can be incorporated into the reflections of the moral agents that the proof is meant to benefit.

The problem, simply put, is that Kant holds 1) that the idea of a moral designer of the universe is necessary from a practical point of view, 2) that we can have no representations of any moral idea (including the idea of God as moral legislator), and 3) that human beings are creatures for whom “...intuitions are always required to verify the reality of our concepts” (§59,351). Thus we can perfectly well form the concept of a universe in which the laws of nature and the moral law are compatible. Likewise, we can conceive of God as the moral author of the universe. What we can not do is form any representation that answers to either of these, or any other idea of reason. This is because ideas as such, to use Kant’s terminology, refer to what is supersensible. As Kant frames the problem in the introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*,

Our entire cognitive faculty is, therefore, presented with an unbounded, but, also, inaccessible field—the field of the supersensible—in which we seek in vain for a territory, and on which, therefore, we can have no realm for theoretical cognition, be it for concepts of understanding or of reason. This field we must indeed occupy with ideas in the interest as well of the theoretical as the practical employment of reason, but in

connection with the laws arising from the concept of freedom we cannot procure for these ideas any but practical reality, which, accordingly, fails to advance our theoretical cognition one step towards the supersensible.

The realm of the sensible (nature) is thus completely cut off from the realm of the supersensible (freedom). The idea of God as moral legislator, to return to the ‘Spinoza’ case, turns out to be necessary from the point of view of morality. Without it ‘Spinoza’ will give in to despair as the result of his sober reflections regarding the fate of the good person in a natural world that appears wholly mechanistic. But, following Kant’s introduction account of the gulf between freedom and nature, ‘Spinoza’ requires more than the idea of God as a postulate of practical thought; he needs to be able to see how the final end of morality can be realized *in nature*. As Kant puts it, we must be able to conceive of the supersensible underlying freedom and the supersensible underlying nature as a unity.

There must, therefore, be a ground of the *unity* of the supersensible that lies at the basis of nature, with what the concept of freedom contains in a practical way, and although the concept of this ground neither theoretically nor practically attains to a knowledge of it, and so has no peculiar realm of its own, still it renders possible the transition from the mode of thought according to the principles of the one to that according to the principles of the other (Introduction, II, 176).

III. Bridging the Gulf between Freedom and Nature

Kant claims in his introduction to the third *Critique* that the regulative idea of the purposiveness of nature, which for him is the idea that provides the faculty of judgment with its legislative principle, is also the “mediating link” that connects the realm of the concept of freedom with the realm of the concept of nature (Introduction IX, 197). Kant

argues, first, that the experience of freedom in judgments of taste that results from the disinterested free play of the cognitive faculties forms the basis of a significant analogy between aesthetic and moral judgments. This analogy, along with judgment's concept of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties, ultimately leads us to view nature as a whole as if it were designed to encourage the realization of the final goal of morality. In this way, the supersensible underlying freedom and the supersensible underlying nature are unified in that what the first prescribes is meant to be realized in the second. This, of course, does not amount to knowledge of this being the case. Instead, Kant suggests, judgment allows us to reflectively join the realms of freedom and nature, but does not advance our speculative knowledge of nature, or alter in the least what the moral law demands of us.

Thus Kant goes well beyond the conclusions of the first and second Critiques regarding the relation between the realms of nature and freedom. In those works, as Guyer observed, Kant aimed to show both that there was no incompatibility between the realms of nature and freedom (*Critique of Pure Reason*), and that morality required of us that we view nature as a whole as subordinate to the ends of morality (*Critique of Practical Reason*). Now Kant is claiming that the faculty of judgment allows us to join the realms of freedom and nature in reflection, and view nature as if it were purposive for morality. Much of the *Critique of Judgment* is devoted to explaining how judgment, both aesthetic and teleological, accomplishes this task.

Our capacity to join freedom and nature in reflection leads to two important results. First, Kant completes the systematic account of our cognitive capacities begun in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The faculty of judgment mediates between the faculty of the

understanding, which is legislative in the realm of the concept of nature, and the faculty of reason, which provides us with practical laws. Second, Kant offers a complex account of how the concept of the purposiveness of nature can be used to reflectively bridge a *felt* gulf between our “natural” selves (human beings as animals) and our noumenal selves (human beings as rational).

My main task in the chapters that follow will be to show how Kant believed the second problem, the one about a felt gulf between nature and freedom, could be solved. I will claim that Kant solves the problem in the following way. Kant argues that the experience of freedom characteristic of judgments of taste, an experience that results from the free play of the cognitive faculties characteristic of aesthetic judgment, precisely because it forms the basis of an analogy with moral judgment, leads us to view our natural selves as purposive for our moral selves. Kant holds that the faculty of judgment allows us to overcome our feeling that freedom and nature are in conflict by way of judgment’s regulative idea of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties, but only because of a set of analogies that we notice between moral and aesthetic judgment.

More specifically, the set of analogies Kant identifies between aesthetic and moral judgment allow us to form symbols of an ultimate harmony between freedom and nature. Kant holds that a great variety of aesthetic experiences provide us with symbols that encourage us to regard freedom and nature as harmonious. Kant will summarize his account of these various cases by calling beauty the symbol of morality.

To return to the case of Spinoza for a moment, the capacity to form symbolic representations of a harmonious relation between freedom and nature would allow him to incorporate the thought of a divine legislator into a rich set of reflections about his own

situation as a moral agent in nature. In this way, aesthetic experience provides a context for the thought that a “moral author of the world” exists; a context apart from, but nevertheless supportive of, the purely rational one supplied by practical reason.

In the chapters that follow, I examine in detail what I take to be the main ways in which, for Kant, aesthetic experience provides us with symbols of a harmonious relation between freedom and nature. My first chapter deals with Kant’s account of judgments of the sublime. Kant’s account of the sublime is relevant to his task of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature in a couple of ways. The sublime, I will argue, is both an aesthetic experience of the gulf between freedom and nature, and yields a powerful symbol of what Kant calls the “primacy of practical reason.” That is, the sublime symbolizes what is expressed in Kant’s claim that in any case of conflict between the interests of practical reason and those of theoretical reason, the latter must give way to the former.

For Kant, the sublime is an aesthetic response to nature’s overwhelming magnitude (mathematical sublime), or might (dynamical sublime). When we experience nature as sublime, the features of nature we are responding to are precisely those that might lead us to conclude that nature is not receptive to the ends of morality. What is sublime in nature, for Kant, is what appears to be counterpurposive for us. So in this sense the sublime amounts to an aesthetic experience of the gulf between freedom and nature.

But Kant’s analysis of the pleasure we take in the sublime has it that what is pleasurable for us in experiences of the sublime is the awareness of our own capacity for morality. This awareness of “the moral law within,” to borrow Kant’s well-known

phrase, allows us to take a different point of view on nature's awe-inspiring might and magnitude. More specifically, the sublime makes us aware that our capacity for moral ideas sets us apart from nature, and makes us, in this one very important sense, superior to nature. In this way, then, the sublime becomes a symbol of the primacy of practical reason.

In my third chapter I begin discussing a series of analogies that Kant draws between judgments of taste and moral judgment. Kant's account of the ways in which moral and aesthetic judgment are linked, as I read it, begins with his discussion of the ideal of beauty in §17, and concludes in his account of beauty as the symbol of morality. I start with an examination of Kant's theory that human beauty is the ideal of taste, move to a consideration of his claim that an interest in natural beauty is a sign of good moral character, and conclude with an overview of the various ways in which, for Kant, beauty is supposed to symbolize morality. My goal in each case is to show how Kant saw aesthetic experience, in this case the experience of beauty, as capable of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature.

In my chapter on the ideal of taste I make two claims. First, I argue that Kant's "ideal of beauty" is best understood, not as a maximally beautiful object, but as a symbol of universal agreement in matters of taste. Second, I claim that Kant's account of the ideal of beauty contributes to his account of the way in which aesthetic judgment helps to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature in the following way. Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty both shows how the ideal of the beautiful can serve as a symbol of the highest good as the goal of morality. In this way an aspect of morality that would otherwise be unrepresentable is supplied with an indirect presentation.

In my second chapter, on Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, I argue that Kant's theory contributes in two ways to his project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature. First, natural beauty awakens in us the hope that nature favors the realization of our moral projects. Kant holds that an immediate interest in natural beauty is best explained in terms of a more basic interest in the actualization of moral ideas in nature. We are interested in natural beauty, for Kant, because it appears as if such beauty were designed with our disinterested pleasure in mind. For this reason, argues Kant, we often feel the need to be "grateful to someone" when we experience the beauty of nature. Put more plainly, the existence of what Kant calls "free beauties" in nature becomes a symbol of an ultimate harmony between nature and freedom. Natural beauty interests us because it encourages us in our hope that nature will prove receptive to the goals of morality.

The second way that Kant's theory of the intellectual interest helps to solve the problem about freedom and nature is that it shows how the "principle of purposiveness," the regulative principle governing the faculty of judgment, allows us to view nature as if it were a work of art. In this way, Kant suggests a connection between the contemplation of natural beauty and teleological judgment, a link that Kant will exploit more fully in *The Critique of Teleological Judgment*.

In my final chapter I discuss Kant's account of beauty as the symbol of morality. As I read Kant's theory that beauty is the symbol of morality, it amounts to a summary of the various ways in which, for him, aesthetic judgment helps to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature. I identify four main stages in Kant's account: (1) In his account of pure judgments of taste Kant explains judgments of taste in terms of a disinterested

aesthetic response to forms which display the appearance of purposiveness. Judgments of taste are also said by Kant to possess “subjective universality” and necessity. These features, along with disinterested pleasure, are typical of judgments of taste. They also form the basis of an analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment that Kant exploits to argue that beauty is the symbol of morality. (2) In Kant’s account of the ideal of beauty, he argues that judgments of taste must ultimately be brought into connection with the goals of morality. Additionally, Kant argues that the ideal of human beauty symbolizes the archetype of taste. (3) In his account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, Kant argues that natural beauty leads us to view nature as if it were designed for our aesthetic pleasure. This encourages us to hope that nature will prove receptive to the goal of morality (the highest good). (4) In his account of beauty as the symbol of morality, Kant summarizes his reflections on the relation between the realms of nature and freedom. Kant calls beauty the symbol of morality precisely because of the various connections between aesthetic and moral judgment detailed above.

Practical Reason and the Sublime

I. Introduction

Kant's third *Critique* includes one of his most sustained reflections on the relationship between the sensible and the rational elements in human existence. Kant's view that the sensible and the rational sides of human nature are often in conflict is a well known feature of his moral philosophy. What is perhaps less well known is that Kant holds that aesthetic judgment plays a crucial role in overcoming the "great gulf" between freedom and nature.

In this chapter I argue that, for Kant, the experience of the sublime bears on the gulf between freedom and nature in the following ways. First, the sublime is an aesthetic experience of the gulf itself. The sublime, for Kant, is an aesthetic response to overwhelming magnitude in nature (mathematical sublime), or nature's destructive forces (dynamically sublime). When we judge an aspect of nature to be sublime we are responding to the appearance of counterpurposiveness in nature. The problem about freedom and nature begins with the observation that it could turn out that nature is not

receptive to our moral goals; the features of nature that we judge to be sublime are just those features that lend weight to the conclusion that nature is indeed not hospitable to our moral ends . Thus the sublime becomes an aesthetic experience of the gulf between freedom and nature.

At the same time, though, the sublime inspires in us an increase in moral resolve that carries with it a guarded hope that the gulf between freedom and nature can be bridged. To the extent that the experience of the sublime allows us to feel the superiority of practical reason to internal and external nature, it encourages moral resolve in us in the face of nature's vast magnitudes and fearsome spectacles.

Before the topic of just how the sublime helps to bridge the gulf between nature and freedom can be taken up, though, there are difficulties with Kant's account of the sublime in §§23-29 that need to be dealt with. In order to pave the way for seeing the Kantian sublime in general as an experience of the superiority of practical reason over what is threatening in nature, I attempt to show that practical reason plays a central role in both the mathematical and dynamically sublime. That practical reason is at the heart of Kant's account of the dynamically sublime is plain, so I have devoted more space in the opening sections of this chapter to an interpretation of the mathematical sublime. My discussion of the dynamically sublime here is aimed at showing how it may be seen to cohere with the general picture of the Kantian sublime I want to suggest, and takes up less space.

In the concluding sections of this chapter I take up the question of how the sublime comes to be both a symbolic presentation of the gulf between freedom and nature, and an anticipation of how that gulf might be bridged. I argue that the primary

significance of the sublime for Kant's overarching project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature is that it inspires in us both humility and hope regarding the question of whether nature will ultimately prove receptive to our moral goals.

II. Practical Reason and the Mathematical Sublime

Before we can see what the importance of practical reason for Kant's account of the mathematical sublime might be, we need to see what that account looks like. Kant begins his exposition of the mathematical sublime with the following formulation of it. To call something sublime, Kant suggests, is to deem it "absolutely great" (§25, 248). "Greatness" here should not be confused with "magnitude," which is an "entirely different concept" (§25, 248). Kant's point here is that "great" and "small" are relational concepts. The magnitude of a given object is judged to be "great" only in relation to the magnitude of other objects. Appearances as such, for Kant, involve magnitude. Thus, as Kant puts it in the first *Critique* "...appearances are all without exception *magnitudes*, indeed *extensive magnitudes*" (A162/B203). But to judge how large or small a given thing is we typically compare it with "something else, which itself has magnitude" as a measure (§25,248). Kant next considers judgments in which we attribute "some quality" to an object without having any specific comparison with other objects in mind. We might, for example, judge of some individual that she "is tall," or "is beautiful" (§25,248). In judgments such as this, Kant observes, we do not mean merely that an

object has the quality “tallness,” for example, but, instead, that the object in question is specially distinguished from other objects of its type by virtue of an undetermined, but sufficiently great, degree of “tallness” (§25,248).

Although judgments of this type are not “comparative” in the same sense as are those in which magnitudes are actually measured against one another using an objective standard, Kant holds that they do involve a *subjective* standard. That is, they involve a standard “...that is presupposed to be one that can be taken as the same for everyone, but which is available only for an aesthetic estimate of greatness, and not for one that is logical (mathematically determined)” (§25,249). This subjective standard may be either an empirical or an a priori one. An example of an empirical subjective standard would be our subjective impression, drawn from our own experience, of “the average size of a human being” (§25,249). Thus we may, without recourse to a mathematical standard, judge that “Andre the Giant” is “big,” or that Siberia is “cold.” A priori subjective standards have their basis in ideas rather than in our experience. Examples of a priori subjective standards mentioned by Kant are our subjective impressions of the degree of virtue or justice in specific cases (ideas of practical reason), and our impressions regarding the “accuracy or inaccuracy” of an experiment (ideas of theoretical reason) (§25,249).

Kant next claims that the judgment that a given thing is “great” involves “a universally communicable delight” (§25,249). Kant explains the pleasure we take in great magnitudes in terms of a “subjective finality in the employment of our cognitive faculties...” (§25,249). This pleasure is unlike the pleasure characteristic of judgments of taste because the latter is due to a subjective finality for cognition in general, while the

judgment that a given thing is “great” is pleasurable because of a finality “for a particular employment of our cognitive faculties in the estimation of magnitude” (§25,249).

Kant is making a couple of points here. First, he maintains that when we find the appearance of great magnitude pleasurable it is “greatness” itself we are responding to, rather than anything more specific about the object of our judgment. Thus, for Kant, it wouldn’t matter whether I was looking at an extensive mountain range or a group of ancient redwoods. In both cases my judgment would be accompanied by a pleasurable response explainable solely in terms of the size of the objects in question. Another way of saying this is to point out that the object of my judgment is final for just that use of my cognitive faculties through which I am able to judge the extent of given magnitudes. Kant’s second point here is that, because my response to great magnitudes depends solely on a subjective finality discoverable in my cognitive faculties, the pleasurable response I experience in such cases is a universally communicable one.

Even though Kant does not make this especially clear, I think the pleasure he is discussing in these passages is distinct from the pleasure involved in the judgment that something is “sublime.” There are three crucial differences between Kant’s account of judgments concerning great magnitudes and the account he gives of judgments of the sublime. The first is that in Kant’s discussion of the pleasurable response to the “merely great” he says nothing about a mingling of pain and pleasure, an element crucial to his account of the sublime. Second, in Kant’s comparison in §25 of the subjective finality in the cognitive faculties characteristic of judgments about “greatness” with that found in judgments of taste he fails to mention the faculty of reason. Since reason, as we shall see, plays an absolutely central role in Kant’s account of the sublime, this would be a curious

omission. Finally, Kant explicitly distinguishes between the two sorts of judgment when he observes that in judgments of sublimity we attribute to the object "...a greatness comparable to itself alone" (§25,250). Thus a judgment that something is "sublime" involves no reference to anything "external to itself" (§25,250).

The judgment that a given thing is "great," on the other hand, does involve a reference to other objects as a standard, though in this case the standard is applied "subjectively." Kant next observes that we misspeak if we call the "things of nature" sublime. This is because, as we have seen, the (mathematical) sublime involves the idea of a magnitude that has no rivals in possible experience. Since, for Kant, it is clear that even the vast expanses of the universe are in principle measurable, Kant concludes that "the sublime is not to be looked for in the things of nature, but only in our own ideas" (§25,250).

Objects of nature, to be sure, may provoke judgments of sublimity, but they are not themselves sublime. Instead, for Kant, reason's demand for "absolute totality," coupled with the inability of the imagination to live up to this demand, makes us aware of reason, the "supersensible faculty within us" (§25,250). What is sublime, in the strictest sense, for Kant, is our mental disposition in the act of contemplating the superiority of reason to both internal and external nature. Kant emphasizes repeatedly that it is not nature's great magnitudes that are sublime, adding that what *is* sublime is the "use to which such objects are put" in making us aware of the faculty of reason. By this, I take it that Kant means that what is sublime is the way our minds are disposed to use our reflections about nature's magnitudes as an occasion for contemplating the superiority of reason.

There are two important features of the mathematical sublime introduced by Kant in §25. First, there is Kant's distinction between mathematical and aesthetic measurement. In mathematical measurement we measure magnitudes against one another by way of arbitrarily chosen objective standards. In "aesthetic" measurement of magnitude we refer to a subjective standard to make an indeterminate judgment of an object's "greatness." In such judgments we say merely that a person is "tall," or a river "wide," without recourse to an objective standard. Second, there is Kant's assertion that what is truly sublime in the case of the mathematical sublime is not nature's great magnitude, but our mental disposition in reflecting about the supremacy of reason over all of our other cognitive capacities.

In §26 Kant elaborates on the distinction between mathematical and aesthetic judgment he introduced in §25, and explains how we may be led by the appearance of vast magnitudes in nature to attribute to them a status "beyond all comparison" (§26,250). Kant holds that aesthetic measurement, in which the relative magnitude of appearances is assessed through imaginative presentation of them, is more basic than mathematical measurement, or the numerical determination of size, in the following sense. Although it is only by way of numbers that we can arrive at a "concept of *how great* anything is," the "fundamental measure" cannot be arrived at mathematically (§26,251). This is because in a numerical series we never encounter magnitude as a "known quantity" (§26,251). Thus, on Kant's account, *all* measurement is in some sense based on the aesthetic variety, in that even in mathematical measurements we ultimately rest our comparisons on some magnitude given in intuition.

Kant next points out that, although there is no limitation on our power to measure things mathematically, for aesthetic measurement there is a “maximum which the imagination cannot exceed” (§26,251). This maximum is that aesthetic measure “beyond which no greater is possible subjectively (i.e. for the judging subject)” (§26,251). That is, it is magnitude taken as absolute “so far as the mind can grasp it in intuition” (§26,251). As we shall shortly see, it is in those presentations that suggest to the imagination the idea of infinity that the maximum aesthetic measure is reached.

Kant’s next move is to appeal to his distinction between “apprehending” a given magnitude and “comprehending” it in order to illustrate just how the existence of a maximum aesthetic measure can lead to a frustration of our powers of presentation that is at the same time final for the faculty of reason. Kant holds that in perceiving magnitude we employ two distinct operations of the imagination. These he terms “apprehension” and “comprehension.” Roughly, “apprehension” is the bare presentation of a magnitude, and “comprehension” is the act of holding the presentation together as a whole (§26,252). Apprehension, for Kant, “can be carried out *ad infinitum*,” but in the case of comprehension there is a limit. That is, there are cases in which a given presentation, due to its great magnitude, strains, or even surpasses, the power of the imagination to exhibit it as a whole (§26,252). The limit for comprehension is reached when,

...the apprehension has reached a point beyond which the representations of sensuous intuition in the case of the parts first apprehended begin to disappear from the imagination as this advances to the apprehension of yet others, as much, then, is lost at one end as is gained at the other, and for comprehension we get a maximum which the imagination cannot exceed (§26,252).

Kant offers two examples here which he discussed as instances of the “noble” and “splendid” in his earlier *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*.³ Kant’s inclusion of them here becomes puzzling if we take him to be using them as examples of the sublime, since he later insists that “rude nature” only is sublime in the strict sense (§26,253). But this is not the role these examples play in Kant’s exposition. Instead, Kant uses them to support the claim that there is a maximum aesthetic measure, and that when it is reached our aesthetic experience of the objects whose magnitude exceeds our grasp is affected.

The first example Kant mentions is Savary’s observation that the “full emotional effect” of the pyramids can be felt only if one avoids coming too near, or remaining at too great a distance from, them. This is presumably because the emotional impact of the sight of the pyramids depends upon getting a distinct impression of their shape. If one attempts to take them in from too far away, the impression received will be “indistinct” (§26,252). Approaching too near them, on the other hand, will result in an “incomplete comprehension.” Kant’s explanation for this is that our power of comprehension is unable to keep pace with our power of apprehension if we are very close to an object of great magnitude.

The second example Kant discusses here is the “bewilderment” experienced by one entering St. Peter’s in Rome.

³ Immanuel Kant. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. John T. Goldthwait, trans, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1960, pp.48-9.)

For here a feeling comes home to him of the inadequacy of the imagination for presenting the idea of a whole within which that imagination attains its maximum, and, in its fruitless efforts to extend this limit, recoils upon itself, but in so doing succumbs to an emotional delight (§26,252).

Again, though it looks as if Kant is using St. Peter's as an example of the sublime, it is not clear that it should be regarded as such. Indeed, Kant denies of both examples that they fully exhibit what goes on in the mathematical sublime. This is because the examples we have been considering are not pure aesthetic judgments. That is, they are still bound up with a consideration of specific human ends, and are thus not properly disinterested.

Kant distinguishes between four kinds of judgment in §26, only one of which he takes to be a pure aesthetic judgment. These are: 1. The "magnificent" or "noble," which is an aesthetic response to simplicity of design in objects of great magnitude. In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* Kant calls the pyramids "simple and noble" (49). Simple design, when combined with great size, is "noble," as long as the size of the object is appropriate in light of the object's purpose. The pyramids, because they are meant to be the eternal dwelling place of departed monarchs, are justly immense. Judgments of nobility are not pure because in calling an object "noble" we take the purpose of that object into consideration. 2. We judge something to be "monstrous," for Kant, when the size of an object is inappropriate with regard to the object's purpose. 3. The "colossal," or a magnitude "bordering on the relatively monstrous" (§26,253). In this case the size of the object approaches, but does not reach,

the point at which it would be inappropriate for an object of its kind. 4. Pure judgments of the sublime, which are not mixed up with any consideration of purpose at all.⁴

In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Kant seems to regard all of the above as variants of the sublime.⁵ In the *Critique of Judgment*, though, Kant makes a distinction between a “pure judgment of the sublime,” and judgments which are based on a consideration of ends. In order to count as a “pure judgment of sublimity,” the act of judging “must have no end belonging to the object as its determining ground” (§26,253).

To return to Kant’s exposition of the mathematical sublime, then, we have seen that he regards the potential for the numerical measurement of magnitude as in principle limitless. In the numerical estimation of magnitudes, the understanding provides “concepts of number” for which the imagination must “supply the schema” (§26,253). Kant adds that we derive no aesthetic pleasure from measuring magnitude in this purely “logical” way (§26,253). Nor is there in this case any demand on the part of reason that we push the imagination to the limit of its powers “... and thus make the single intuition holding the many in one (the comprehension) as great as possible” (§26,254). Further, in mathematical measurement, the size of the unit is of no importance.

In this mathematical estimation of magnitude understanding is as well served and as satisfied whether imagination selects for the unit a magnitude which one can take in at a glance, e.g. a foot, or a perch, or else a German mile, or even the earth’s diameter, the apprehension of which is indeed possible, but not its comprehension in an intuition of the imagination (§26,254).

⁴ Kant’s account here seems to suggest that we should regard the mathematical sublime as analogous to a pure judgment of taste (free beauty), and the dynamical sublime as like “adherent judgments of taste” (dependent beauty).

⁵ Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 48-9.

In the case of aesthetic measurement, however, reason demands totality for any given intuition. This is true “even for those [presentations] which can never be completely apprehended” (§26,254). Thus in the case of the progressively increasing numerical series mentioned above, reason dictates that each of its stages we attempt to comprehend it in “one intuition” (§26,254). This demand extends even to the idea of the infinite, an idea which will be suggested to the imagination by the progressive series itself. That is, we are struck by the fact that even great magnitudes, such as the diameter of the earth, are made small by some other standard. We might, for example, think of the earth as tiny compared with the size of the solar system, the solar system as small in comparison with the Milky Way galaxy, and so on.

But the idea of the infinite, which, for Kant, is an idea of reason, refers to what is large beyond all comparison. One way of conceiving of the idea of the infinite, for Kant, is as the “...transcendental idea of the absolute totality of the synthesis in the series of conditions” as it is “applied to space” (A413/B440). For Kant, the infinite is unrepresentable. Reason’s capacity to merely conceive of the infinite, though, “indicates a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense” (§26,255). Specifically, argues Kant, in reason’s “idea of a noumenon...as substrate underlying the intuition of the world as mere phenomenon” the infinite is “completely comprehended *under* a concept”(§26,255).

Nature is called mathematically sublime, for Kant, just when its phenomenon “in their intuition convey the idea of their infinity” (§26,255). The failure of the imagination

to comprehend infinity is experienced as painful by the judging subject. At the same time, though, we are made aware of our faculty of reason, which we are led to esteem more highly than any of our other faculties. The failure of the imagination, then, is taken to be in harmony with the preeminence of reason. For this reason the feeling accompanying judgments of sublimity is a complex one; a mingling of humiliation and pleasure.

Importantly, however, what Kant takes to be “sublime” in judgments of the mathematical sublime is not reason per se, but the mental disposition of one who reflects about the superiority of reason to both the faculty of the imagination and to nature itself. Though it is true that in the mathematical sublime we judge reason to be superior to both the imagination and to nature, it is not this superiority in and of itself that Kant is calling sublime. What is sublime, according to Kant, is the mental disposition of the judging subject who in her judgments esteems the faculty of reason above both imagination and nature.

Kant makes this point in a couple of ways in §26. First, in the course of explaining just how the faculty of reason “transcends every standard of sensibility,” Kant remarks that reason is “...great beyond all comparison even with the faculty of mathematical estimation; not, of course, from a theoretical point of view that looks to the interests of our faculty of knowledge, but as a broadening of the mind that from another (the practical) point of view feels itself empowered to pass beyond the narrow confines of sensibility” (§26,255). And again, in discussing the “subjective accord” between imagination and reason in the mathematical sublime, Kant writes,

...just as the aesthetic judgment in its estimate of the beautiful refers the imagination in its free play to the *understanding*, to bring out its agreement with the *concepts* of the latter in general (apart from their determination): so in its estimate of a thing as sublime it refers that faculty to *reason* to bring out its subjective accord with *ideas* of reason (indeterminately indicated), i.e. to induce a temper of mind conformable to that which the influence of definite (practical) ideas would produce upon feeling, and in common accord with it (§26,254).

As Kant will make plain, it is the above “temper of mind” that is, properly speaking, sublime.

Let us look more carefully at “temper of mind” Kant is here calling sublime. In judgments of the mathematical sublime there is a harmonious relationship between reason and the imagination that in some sense mirrors the relation between the latter and the understanding in the case of judgments of taste. In judgments of taste, for Kant, we notice a spontaneous accord between imagination and understanding in the apprehension of the mere form of an object. Imagination and understanding, which are jointly necessary for the cognition of any object whatsoever, are here engaged in a “free play” because the object of a pure judgment of taste is not brought under any particular concept. The free play of the faculties is experienced as pleasurable; a pleasure which is universally communicable because it is based solely on a relation between cognitive faculties which everyone can be presumed to have. This universally communicable pleasure, for Kant, becomes the basis for the judgment of taste. The pleasurable aspect of the mathematical sublime, as we have seen, is the result of noticing an accord between reason and imagination. More specifically, the *failure* of the imagination to comprehend great magnitude is in harmony with the superiority of reason, and its ends, over all of our other faculties.

Though Kant casts his account of the relation of the faculties in judgments of sublimity in the form of an analogy with judgments of taste, the “harmony of the faculties” he proposes in the case of the sublime is significantly different from the free play of the faculties characteristic of judgments of taste. The first, and most obvious difference, is that the pleasure we take in the sublime is mediated by a “displeasure,” while the pleasure of the beautiful is direct. When we judge something to be “beautiful,” for Kant, our pleasurable response to that object is immediate because it is based solely on the fact that our cognitive powers are engaged in a purposive free play. But in the case of the sublime our “immediate” experience is the pain of the failure of our capacity to comprehend the object. It is only when we reflect further about our cognitive capacities that the faculty of the imagination comes to be in harmony with the faculty of reason in judgments of the sublime.

There are a number of interpretive difficulties that arise in connection with Kant’s discussion of the feeling of the sublime. First, in differentiating the sublime from the beautiful Kant had claimed that the latter was a “positive pleasure”, while the former, in that it relied on the mediation of a displeasure, was better thought of as a “negative pleasure” (§23,245). As Guyer observes, the fact that Kant feels entitled to make this distinction at all is puzzling if one holds him to his official view that feelings of pleasure are distinguishable only in respect of quantity, not quality.⁶ In this case, though, Kant makes the difference hinge on the fact, noted by him earlier, that the sublime, unlike the beautiful, involves an emotion. In §13 Kant defines emotion as “...a sensation where an agreeable feeling is produced merely by means of a momentary check followed by a more

⁶ Ibid.197.

powerful outpouring of the vital force...” (§14,226). Kant further remarks that such a powerful sensation does not occur in connection with judgments of taste, but is “connected” to judgments of sublimity. Thus whereas the beautiful “is directly attended with a feeling of the furtherance of life”, and amounts to a “positive pleasure”, the sublime is “a pleasure that only arises indirectly” (§23,245). Kant holds that the sublime “...is brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, and so it is an emotion that seems to be no sport, but dead earnest in the affairs of the imagination” (§23,245). Given Kant’s distinction between simple pleasure and emotion, then, he seems entitled to make a phenomenological distinction between the sublime and the beautiful that would otherwise be at odds with what he writes elsewhere concerning pleasure.⁷

Secondly, as Guyer notes, it is at times unclear whether Kant wants us to think of the sublime as a single but complex emotion in which pleasure and pain are joined, or as an alternating series of sensations that begins with pain but is ultimately satisfying.⁸ I think that a careful reading of Kant on this score reveals that there is no inconsistency in accepting both as adequate descriptions of the emotional character of the sublime. In the *Anthropology* account of pleasure, Kant claims that any “gratification” will involve both pleasure and pain.⁹ He writes that,

⁷ Kant’s argument that simple pleasures are only different from one another in degree is not very persuasive. Kant argues in the second *Critique* that because the feeling of pleasure can only be known empirically, and it affects “the same life force”, it must be the case that pleasures can only be meaningfully distinguished in terms of their strength, or degree (S:23). But Kant himself, when he characterizes the pleasure that accompanies a judgment of taste as one of “restful contemplation”, to cite just one example, seems to make phenomenological distinctions between kinds of pleasure.

⁸ *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.196-7.

...no gratification can immediately follow another; but between one and another there must occur pain. Actually small checks on our vital power, with interspersed advancements constitute the state of health which we erroneously take for a continuously felt condition of well being.¹⁰

In §27 of the third *Critique*, Kant remarks that in the sublime the mind is “set in motion” (§27,258). He also asserts that this motion can be compared to “a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction”, or a “vibration.” (§27,258). Kant is not claiming, however, that the sublime *is* such a series, but only that it may be compared to one. His characterization of it as a “vibration” suggests a whole, as in a musical chord in which different tones are combined; while the notion of a “series” emphasizes motion. It may be, then, that Kant is thinking of the sublime as *both* a movement involving alternating moments of pleasure and pain, and as a whole in which those moments are harmoniously combined. In the end, then, in the sublime pleasure and pain are more or less harmoniously blended in a “vibration.”¹¹ Another way of putting this would be to say that we feel the series all at once, as if it were a whole, but are at the same time aware that this whole is complex.

In the case of the mathematical sublime, for Kant, it is the state of mind induced in us by the idea of infinity that is sublime. But why does the thought of infinity lead to the experience of the mathematical sublime for Kant? Kant explains that the thought of “infinity comprehended,” which is what our idea of infinity suggests to us, “...carries our concept of nature to a supersensible substrate (underlying both nature and our faculty of

⁹ Kant, *Anthropology*, 132.

¹⁰ Kant, *Anthropology*, 132.

thought) which is great beyond every standard of sense" (§26,256). The feeling that this series of reflections induces in us, for Kant, can be described as a "broadening" of our point of view (§26,256). More specifically, in the conjunction of reason with imagination characteristic of our experience of the mathematical sublime reason is made aware that its capacity for framing ideas elevates it "in its own estimation of itself." The state of mind of one who is contemplating the superiority of reason in this way is analogous to respect for the moral law. I will have more to say about this analogy below, but at this stage it is important to keep in mind that Kant is claiming that it is this mental state itself, rather than the mere thought that reason is superior to nature, that is sublime. In other words, in one sense it would be mistaken to say that it is reason itself that is "sublime" here. What is sublime is the act of reflecting about the superiority of reason.

Now it might be objected to what I have said so far that I have not sufficiently differentiated between the mathematical and the dynamical sublime. Although Kant makes it plain in the case of the dynamical sublime that it turns on a felt awareness of the superiority of the ends and interests of practical reason over nature, this is less clear in his discussion of the mathematical sublime. The mathematical sublime, for Kant, seems to have to do with a theoretical use of reason (measuring magnitude), so it is natural to conclude that in this case it is theoretical reason that ends up being superior to nature. And this is how commentators have tended to read Kant on this score. Sarah Gibbons, for example, has the following to say about what distinguishes the dynamical sublime from the mathematical.

¹¹ The *Anthropology* account of pleasure suggests that even in the case of emotions that we characterize as "pure pleasures" there is a mixture of pleasure and pain. It is plausible to assume that in an unusually intense emotion, like the sublime, we are more aware of this complexity.

We do not, in this case think the idea of infinity or some absolute whole as a cognitive response to failed comprehension; instead, we think of *ourselves* in our rational character as transcending our own natural being. What we recognize, then, is the power of pure practical reason, not the ideas of theoretical reason. The experience therefore takes on a more immediately moral character, which the mathematical sublime seems to lack (148).¹²

Similarly, Paul Crowther claims that in the dynamical sublime “...an awareness of our moral existence plays a much more direct role” (110).¹³

But this conclusion, while in some ways true to the letter of what Kant says in his account of the sublime, is misleading. I think it would be mistaken to put too much emphasis on the differences Kant notes between the mathematical and the dynamical sublime. As I read him, Kant does claim that when we judge something to be mathematically sublime we become aware of the faculty of reason in its theoretical use. It does not follow from this, however, that it is theoretical reason, and not practical reason, that we regard as superior to nature in this case. Nor does it follow that the feeling of sublimity in the case of the dynamical sublime is somehow more “immediately” moral than it is in the case of the mathematical sublime, which I take it is what Gibbons means when she claims this about the “experience” of the dynamical sublime. On the contrary, as I argue below, the feeling of the sublime is the same in each case. It is the feeling of one who regards reason as superior to both the other cognitive faculties and their interests, and as superior to nature. I turn now to an examination of Kant’s account of the feeling of the sublime.

¹² Sarah Gibbons, *Kant’s Theory of Imagination: Bridging Gaps in Judgment and Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹³ Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

In §27, Kant discusses, under the heading of “quality”, the feeling of the sublime itself. According to Kant’s account of it here, the feeling of the sublime is best understood as a feeling of respect for “the idea of humanity within us” which is erroneously directed towards the object of nature that provokes the feeling of sublimity.

...the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we attribute to an Object of nature by a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the Object in place of one for the idea of humanity in our own self-the Subject); and this feeling renders, as it were, intuitable the supremacy of our cognitive faculties on the rational side over the greatest faculty of sensibility (§27,257).

Though Kant plainly says here that the feeling of the sublime “is” respect (Achtung), what I think he really means to say is that the sublime is *like* respect. According to Kant’s account of respect in the second *Critique*, the sole cause, and object, of the feeling of respect is the moral law itself as the determining ground of our actions. Kant contends that the moral law is “...an object of the greatest *respect* and so too the ground of a positive feeling that is not of empirical origin and is cognized a priori” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:73). But the feeling of the sublime, unlike the feeling of respect as described by Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, is caused by our experience of certain features of nature (nature’s great magnitude and overwhelming forces). Thus the feeling of the sublime is unlike the feeling of respect in that the former is a felt response to nature (and is thus of empirical origin) whereas the latter results solely from a consideration of the moral law as an incentive to moral action.

Additionally, Kant himself emphasizes the uniqueness of the feeling of respect in his discussion of it in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and explicitly distinguishes it

from the kind of feeling he calls “sublime” in the *Critique of Judgment*. Kant calls the feeling of the sublime “amazement” in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, and writes that “...amazement, can be directed to...lofty mountains, the magnitude, number, and distance of the heavenly bodies, the strength and swiftness of many animals, and so forth” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:76). This feeling, observes Kant, “is not respect,” and should not be confused with it (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:76).

For the above reasons, I think it is best to regard Kant’s identification of the feeling of the sublime as a kind of respect in the *Critique of Judgment* as an attempt to develop an analogy between the feeling of sublimity and the feeling of respect for the moral law, rather than a strict identification of the sublime as a case of respect. I now turn to a more detailed comparison of the two kinds of feeling.¹⁴

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant claims that respect is a negative feeling that can be attributed to the effect of the moral law on the mind. Importantly, the feeling of respect itself is not an “antecedent feeling in the subject” for morality. Kant’s point here is just that morality cannot be based on any feeling. If it were, our incentive to morality would be based on sensible conditions. Since, for Kant, the incentive to morality must come solely from the moral law, the feeling of respect cannot be regarded as a basis for morality. Instead, respect, or moral feeling, is, for Kant, the subjective effect of pure practical reason. It is “...morality itself subjectively considered as an incentive...”(*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:76).

¹⁴ If it turns out that Kant actually meant to identify the sublime as a species of respect, however, my argument that even in the case of the mathematical sublime we are led to regard practical reason as superior to nature would be strengthened; for, in that case, since the only possible source of respect is the moral law itself, and Kant claims that the feeling of the mathematical sublime “is respect,” we could not explain the feeling of the mathematical sublime without reference to practical reason

Kant's account of respect in the *Critique of Practical Reason* bears marked similarities to his account of the sublime, and, though he doesn't discuss this point in any great detail in the *Critique of Judgment*, it is presumably these similarities he has in mind when he claims there that the feeling of the sublime is a kind of respect. The first way in which the two feelings are alike is that they are both, at least at the outset, negative feelings that result from comparing the sensible, or natural, with the rational. In the case of respect, Kant holds that the contemplation of the moral law has a profound effect on one's attitude towards oneself.

"Self regard," for Kant, refers to all of our sensible inclinations taken as a whole. As such, it has two main components; self love and self conceit. The first is just a feeling of general "benevolence" towards oneself. The second is a feeling of "satisfaction with oneself" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:73). In contemplating the moral law, one's self love is curtailed in such a way that it conforms itself to the demands of practical reason. One retains as much self love as is compatible with following the moral law. Kant calls this "rational self love" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:73). The effect of the moral law on self conceit is more dramatic. The thought of the moral law "...strikes down self conceit altogether, since all claims to esteem for oneself that precede accord with the moral law are null and quite unwarranted because certainty of a disposition in accord with this law is the first condition of any worth of a person... and any presumption prior to this is false and opposed to the law" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:73). So the feeling of respect is first of all a kind of self-chastisement based on a comparison of one's sensible inclinations with what the moral law commands of us.

The feeling of the sublime, both mathematical and dynamical, also begins with a feeling of self humiliation. In this case, it is either pain at our failure to live up to a demand of theoretical reason (mathematical sublime), or pain resulting from the contemplation of our helplessness as a creature of nature in the face of the latter's overwhelming might (dynamical sublime), that produces this feeling in us. In both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime, we experience an emotional displeasure at the fact of our own limitations as a species of nature. The mathematical sublime involves a limitation in respect of our capacity to comprehend nature, the dynamical sublime involves a limitation on our prospects for success, or even survival, as a member of the natural order. Thus the feeling of the sublime is like that of respect in that it is first of all a feeling of our own limitations. The difference between the two feelings here is that respect is a feeling of the limitations of one's own self in respect of one's capacity to live up to the demands of morality, whereas the sublime leads us to consider limitations that attach to human beings collectively in respect of the comprehension of the magnitude of nature and the resistance to the forces of nature.

The next way respect and sublimity are like one another is that in both cases the "humiliation" of one aspect of ourselves leads to the elevation of another. In respect, the comparison of our sensible inclinations with the demands of the moral law results in, not only the humiliation of our self-conceit, but, more positively, in a feeling of having overcome an impediment to morality. Kant stops short of describing this as a "pleasure." Instead, he describes it as a "positive" feeling insofar as it is a feeling of the removal of a potential hindrance to the fulfillment of the moral law. Thus respect is a feeling of the elevation of practical reason over sensibility.

The case is similar with the feeling of the sublime. The sublime is pleasurable to the extent that in it we have a feeling of the superiority of reason over nature. In the mathematical sublime, the contemplation of infinity is a sublime state of mind that Kant describes as enlarged precisely because it subordinates our other faculties, and nature itself, to reason. In the case of the dynamical sublime, as we shall see, the spectacle of nature in its fearsome aspects leads to the same result. The feeling of the sublime in general, like that of respect, involves a reversal in the mind's estimate of itself. more specifically, from the enlarged point of view that Kant is calling sublime the capacity of reason to produce ideas is elevated over the imagination, and the whole power of the mind itself is elevated over nature.

The experience of the sublime, then, involves both a kind of "self- humiliation" provoked by certain limitations placed on us by the sensible side of our nature, and a positive feeling that results from the thought of the superiority of reason and its interests to both our other faculties and to nature. It is in these respects analogous to the feeling of respect for the moral law. Kant calls this complex state of mind "sublime" because it is in these ways like respect, the state of mind in which the interests of the sensibility are subordinated to those of reason.

But it is only from the point of view of morality that it is important that we subordinate sensibility to reason in this way. The subordination of our sensible inclinations to the rule of reason is a necessary condition for moral action, and hence of obvious interest from the point of view of practical reason. From the point of view of theoretical reason, however, which, for Kant, is interested mainly in "...the cognition of the object up to the highest principles," the feeling of the sublime would have no

particular value (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:120). Kant remarks in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that the feeling of respect for the moral law is “quite impenetrable for speculative reason” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:120). We may plausibly assume, then, that the “sublimity” of a state of mind that so closely resembles respect for the moral law is equally impenetrable from the point of view of speculative reason.

This is the main reason that I think that Kant held that, even though the mathematical sublime arises in a theoretical context (the measurement of magnitude), it is only from the point of view of practical reason, and its interests, that we call the feeling of the mind as it contemplates its own capacity for ideas sublime.

An additional reason for thinking that the mathematical sublime is only sublime from the point of view of practical reason concerns the “content” of the experience of the sublime. Though Kant does not make this especially clear, I think that, for him, the state of mind of one who contemplates the sublime, both mathematical and dynamical, is an elevated state of mind because in it the interests of the sensibility are subordinated to the interests, not just of reason, but, more specifically, to the interests of practical reason. This is plainly the case with the dynamical sublime. Kant suggests in the following passage from §26 that we should think of the mathematical sublime along the same lines.

Even a faculty enabling the infinite of supersensible intuition to be regarded as given (in its intelligible substrate), transcends every standard of sensibility, and is great beyond all comparison even with the faculty of mathematical estimation: not, of course, from a theoretical point of view that looks to the interests of our faculty of knowledge, but as a broadening of the mind that from another (the practical) point of view feels itself empowered to pass beyond the narrow confines of sensibility (§26,255).

Kant's point here seems to be that it is only from the "practical point of view" that the mathematical sublime affords us a feeling of superiority over nature because the experience of the sublime is the result of comparing reason *as a whole* with nature. In judgments of the mathematical sublime, for Kant, the mind is led from a consideration of theoretical reason and its idea infinity to a reflection concerning reason as a whole and its relationship to nature. This "broadening" of the mind also involves a movement from a consideration of the interests "of our faculty of knowledge" to a consideration of the interests of practical reason because, following the lesson of the "Primacy of Practical Reason" section of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the interests of reason taken as a whole are ultimately practical. For Kant, pure speculative reason and pure practical reason must be thought of, not as "merely side by side (co-ordinated)", but as a unity in which the interests of speculative reason are subordinate to those of practical reason.¹⁵ Thus "...every interest is ultimately practical, even that of speculative reason being only conditional and reaching perfection only in practical use."¹⁶

This last point also helps to explain why Kant, in §29 of the *Critique of Judgment*, contends that a feeling for the sublime will exist only in those who have a prior interest in moral ideas (§29,265). Those who lack the requisite "preparatory culture" will be incapable of experiencing the attraction to what is "forbidding to sensibility" that is characteristic of the mathematical sublime (§29,265). This attraction, writes Kant, is the result of "...the fact of its [the initial failure of the imagination in the mathematical sublime] being a dominion which reason exercises over sensibility with a view to extending it to the requirements of its own realm (*the practical*) and letting it

¹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 122:126.

look out beyond itself into the infinite, which for it is an abyss" (§26,265). If we were not able to avail ourselves of the point of view of reason's "own realm," which Kant here identifies as the practical, the sublime would be merely terrible. So one of the difficult lessons of the mathematical sublime is that it is only from the perspective of reason as a unified realm, in which its theoretical interests are subordinated to its practical ones, that we are able to have an aesthetic experience of the sublime at all.

In this section my main goal, aside from elucidating Kant's account of the mathematical sublime, has been to show that, for Kant, the mathematical sublime, like the dynamical sublime, involves an experience of the superiority of practical reason over nature. There are two reasons that I think the superiority of practical reason is central to the experience of the mathematical sublime. My first reason for claiming that it is the superiority of practical reason that the experience of the mathematical sublime highlights for Kant has to do with the analogy he draws between the feeling of the sublime in general and the feeling of respect for the moral law.

Since Kant's analogy here is between the feeling of the sublime in general and respect, one thing Kant's discussion of this analogy shows, I think, is that the mental disposition Kant is calling sublime in both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime is the same mental disposition. More specifically, it is the mental disposition of one who regards the requirements placed on us by reason as superior to sensibility and its interests. But this disposition to recognize the preeminence of reason is only "sublime," or elevated," from a practical point of view. That is, it is only from the point of view of morality that a state of mind characterized by a recognition of the superiority of reason

¹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 122:126.

over our other faculties and over nature is sublime. We can conclude, I think, that, even though it occurs in a theoretical context, the mathematical sublime is judged to be sublime from the point of view of practical reason.

The second reason practical reason is key in Kant's account of the mathematical sublime has to do with the content of judgments of the mathematical sublime. Judgments of the mathematical sublime, for Kant, have two components: a displeasure at the failure of our imagination to comprehend great magnitudes, and a pleasure arising from our awareness of the superiority of reason over both the faculty of the imagination and over nature. I have argued that, for Kant, it is specifically practical reason that is judged to be superior in the case of the mathematical sublime, even though it is an operation of theoretical reason (measurement) that serves as the point of departure for this sort of judgment.

This completes my discussion of the mathematical sublime as such. I return to it in my section IV, in which I attempt to provide a summary account of Kant's theory of the sublime. As I stated earlier, I do not regard the mathematical and dynamical sublime as different types of aesthetic judgment; rather, they are two ways of comparing the human to the natural aesthetically that, through the mediation of a displeasure, amount to an experience of the superiority of morality and its interests over nature.

III. The Dynamical Sublime

Before I can outline what I take to be Kant's more general characterization of the sublime, I need to examine those sections of the *Critique of Judgment* in which he discusses the dynamical sublime. In the dynamical sublime we are "invited" to imaginatively compare our ends, or "desires", with the potentially destructive forces of nature. In the might of nature, for Kant, we confront that which has the potential to frustrate all of our ends. Thus, as was the case with the mathematical sublime, the comparison between ourselves and nature initially favors nature. What nature cannot harm, however, is "humanity in our own person" (§28,262). That is, from the point of view of our own autonomy we are impervious to nature's great forces (§28,262).

Kant defines "might" as a "power which is superior to great hindrances", and distinguishes it from "dominion", or force that is superior even to might. In what strikes us as dynamically sublime, nature is experienced as "might that has no dominion over us" (§28,260). Kant's point here is that in the sublime, though nature is experienced as something fearful and awe inspiring, we are also aware that nature does not have power over that which we make of ourselves through freedom. The awareness of our capacity to act in accordance with the moral law even when confronting great, even life destroying, force, provides us with a basis for judging that, in terms of our freedom, we are impervious to all of nature's destructive forces.

Kant, echoing Burke's account of the sublime, next urges that a thing may be fearful without causing us to actually be afraid of it (§28,260). Kant's example here is "the righteous man who fears God without being afraid of Him" (§28,260). Such a person has no reason to actually be afraid of God, but will nonetheless think of God as "one to be feared" (§28,260). In order for something to be experienced as dynamically

sublime, then, it must be fearful without provoking actual fear. Kant will later argue, for example, that one who is actually in fear of divine punishment can have no appreciation of the grandeur that attaches to the idea of God.

Just as in the mathematical sublime, for Kant, we were made aware of a supersensible faculty through the mediation of a displeasure at the failure of imagination in the service of the understanding to live up to reason's demand that we comprehend the infinite, so in the dynamical sublime violent displays in nature which at first strike us as a threat to the actualization of human ends ultimately serve to make us aware of "a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature" (§28,260). And, just as with the mathematical sublime, our state of mind when contemplating this "power of resistance" is what is, properly speaking, sublime. As Kant puts it, "...nature is here called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to a presentation of those cases in which the mind can make itself sensible of the appropriate sublimity of the sphere of its own being, even above nature" (§26,262).

What we (erroneously) call dynamically sublime in nature, for Kant, is that which reminds us of the contingency and frailty of our existence as creatures of nature, while at the same time making us aware of the dignity of our vocation as rational beings. In the dynamically sublime we are led to regard everything which nature's forces can take from us, our "worldly goods, health, and life", as small in comparison with practical reason. That is, our fragility, and indeed our mortality, as natural creatures is seen as harmonizing with the superiority of practical reason over both inner and outer nature.

In the discussions that follow Kant's initial formulation of the dynamical sublime he extends the number of events that can occasion the sublime to include heroism in warfare and the thought of God as moral legislator. Although this may at first seem puzzling, it becomes less so when we recall that, for Kant, natural objects are only called "sublime" by a "subreption" in the first place. To observe that heroism is sublime in a soldier, and that warfare itself is in some sense sublime, is not a significant departure from the account of the dynamical sublime Kant details in §28. What we admire in a heroic soldier, on Kant's account, is his willingness to regard his own life as unimportant compared to the principles for which he is fighting. It is the soldier's disposition, or "cast of mind," that is sublime. What this kind of heroism illustrates for us is that in so far as we are ends in ourselves, and not mere means to the mechanical ends of nature, we are superior to even the most fearsome manifestations of the might of nature.¹⁷

IV. An Overview of Kant's Account of the Sublime

¹⁷ Simone Weil, in her essay "The *Illiad*, Poem of Might", expresses a view of war as a form of natural might that is strikingly close to Kant's. She writes that "The human soul never ceases to be modified by its encounter with might...", because we can define might as "that which makes a thing of anybody that comes under its sway" (Weil,24). War, on this account, does not differ essentially from the kind of natural force present in nature because war, once it is set into motion, proceeds with the kind of blind necessity characteristic of mechanistic nature. The *Illiad* illustrates this "...by its similes, by making warriors apparitions of great natural phenomenon: a conflagration, a flood, the wind, ferocious beasts, any and every blind cause of disaster (Weil,45). Weil's similarity to Kant does not end here. She further remarks that, although might is the main subject of the *Illiad*, what makes the poem great is the occasional "...luminous

The sublime in general, for Kant, is a feeling that results from a comparison of the human with what is fearful or awe inspiring in nature. If what occasions this measurement is a great magnitude, we have a case of the mathematical sublime. If, on the other hand, we are provoked to compare ourselves with nature by some display of nature's might, we are dealing with what Kant calls the "dynamically sublime in nature."

According to the *Anthropology* account of the sublime, nature "invites" measurement as to both its extent and its power. As we have seen, in the case of the mathematical sublime it is nature's great magnitude which invites measurement, while in the dynamical sublime it is the overpowering forces of nature. Either version of the sublime can occur on its own, or the same object may prove both mathematically and dynamically sublime.

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In both cases, for Kant, what is sublime, in the strictest sense of the term, is the mental disposition of the subject who is making the judgment of sublimity. This point becomes obscured at times in Kant's discussion of the sublime because part of the experience of the sublime is a realization of the superiority of reason over nature, and in this respect it is reason itself that is "sublime" (elevated). It is important, however, that we distinguish between Kant's description of what goes on in the experience of the sublime, and what is actually supposed to *be* sublime for Kant. It is part of our

moments, brief and divine moments in the souls of men" in which by virtue of our humanity we escape "the empire of might"(Weil,46).

¹⁸ Although Kant does not explicitly entertain this latter possibility, he does suggest, in §24, that the division between the dynamical and the mathematical sublime exists, not because of a difference in object, but because of the imagination's capacity to be affected either "mathematically" or "dynamically" (§24,247).

experience of the sublime that we come to see the superiority of reason over nature, but this experience itself is “sublime” because of the mental disposition it requires of us.

In both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime the experience of the sublime begins with a comparison of the human with the natural. In each case, the comparison initially favors nature. In the first, the mathematical sublime, our powers of comprehension are overwhelmed in their attempt to grasp great magnitude. In the second, the dynamically sublime, nature displays its power to frustrate our ends. But, again, in both cases, what begins as a measurement of our human capacities with nature outside of us ends up as a reflection about various relations that can be drawn between those capacities, or “faculties,” themselves. The result of this second comparison is that we see that the faculty of reason, in its practical uses, must be ranked above both our own desire to have our ends realized and the power of the understanding to comprehend nature. This awareness of practical reason’s superiority over all other human faculties is at the same time an awareness of the superiority of human freedom over nature. So the outcome of the initial comparison turns out to be deceptive. Though it remains true that our powers of comprehension do not allow us to grasp great magnitude in nature, and that nature often appears quite opposed to human ends, if we look at the matter from the point of view of our own autonomy then we are superior to nature. To use Kant’s second *Critique* terminology, then, the sublime is an experience of the primacy of practical reason.

In both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime it is the state of mind, or mental disposition, of one who contemplates the ascendancy of reason over nature that is properly called sublime. The mental disposition of one who reflects in this way is sublime because in it one subordinates sensibility and its interests to reason. This is the

basis of Kant's analogy of the feeling of the sublime with the feeling of respect; the two kinds of feeling are like one another because in each case what begins as a displeasure resulting from a kind of "self humiliation" ends as a "positive" feeling from the point of view of practical reason.

IV. The Sublime and the Gulf between Freedom and Nature

In Kant's introduction to the third *Critique* he mentions a "great gulf" that exists between the "realm of the concept of freedom" and the "realm of the concept of nature." Kant's problem is something like the following. The moral law prescribes ends for us that are meant to be realized in nature, but, at the same time, we have no guarantee that nature will prove receptive to those ends. Additionally, there are good reasons to think that nature will *not* prove receptive to the ends of morality. First of all, internal nature (sensibility) frequently conflicts with what the moral law requires of us. That is, our sensible inclinations predispose us to shirk the demands placed on us by the moral law. Second, there is no good reason to think that external nature favors human ends over those of other kinds of creatures. Human beings are just as subject to nature's destructive forces as are other creatures of nature. We can, then, rightfully raise the question of whether the hope for an ultimate harmony between freedom and nature is reasonable given what experience shows us about both external and internal nature.¹⁹

The aspect of the gulf between freedom and nature that I am most interested in this chapter, and in those that follow, is the effect of this gulf on feeling. As I read Kant,

¹⁹ For more on how to interpret Kant on the gulf between freedom and nature see my introduction.

the gulf between freedom and nature he discusses in the introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* is, among other things, a felt gulf. That is, even given a demonstration of the compatibility of freedom and nature, we still fear that it might turn out that nature is indifferent, or even hostile, to our ends.

In this section I will argue that Kant's account of the sublime is relevant to his problem of the gulf between freedom and nature in two ways. First, the experience of the sublime, because it paradigmatically involves aspects of nature that are counterpurposive for us, amounts to an aesthetic experience of the gulf between freedom and nature itself. Second, insofar as the feeling of the sublime resembles respect for the moral law, the sublime inspires in us a kind of "moral resolve" that brings with it a rational hope that nature will prove receptive to the ends of morality after all.

The sublime amounts to an experience of the gulf between freedom and nature in the following sense. Those items we call sublime in nature appear opposed to our ends in various dramatic ways. In the case of the mathematical sublime, nature's great magnitudes are counterpurposive for us because they overwhelm our powers of comprehension, and in this way prevent us from fulfilling theoretical reason's demand for completeness in every perception. The dynamical sublime is counterpurposive in a much more direct way; it is provoked by nature's might precisely when that might appears threatening, or "fearsome," to us. It is that within nature that appears too powerful for us to resist that provokes the dynamical sublime. So the dynamical sublime in nature is, first of all, an experience of those manifestations of nature that suggest that nature is not only not receptive to our ends, but that it forcefully opposes those ends.

The fact that the experience of the sublime is provoked by what is counterpurposive for us makes the sublime, for Kant, less significant than the beautiful in terms of suggesting a unity of the ends of freedom with the ends of nature. Whereas the appearance of beautiful forms in nature may suggest to us an ultimate harmony between freedom and nature, the sublime aspects of nature suggest just the opposite. One way Kant puts point is to say that the sublime, as formless, is not part of our aesthetic experience of the appearance of purposiveness in nature. “It [the sublime] gives no indication of anything final in nature itself, but only in the possible *employment* of our intuitions of it in inducing a feeling in our own selves of a finality quite independent of nature” (§23, 246).

Natural beauty, for Kant, awakens an “intellectual interest” because practical reason is naturally interested in the appearance of purposiveness without objective purpose in objects of nature.²⁰ Roughly, Kant’s idea is that natural beauty is of interest to practical reason because it suggests to us a conception of nature according to which certain objects of nature are designed for our contemplative delight. Kant is, of course, not claiming that natural beauty is *evidence* of design. It merely suggests to us a particular way of reflecting about nature. More specifically, it suggests a picture of nature as hospitable to our moral goals. In this way, as we shall see, reflections about natural beauty become one way in which aesthetic experience helps to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature.

The sublime, however, does nothing to further our reflections about a possible purposiveness in nature. On the contrary, Kant claims that what we find sublime in

²⁰ I discuss Kant’s account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful in chapter two.

nature is precisely that which suggests a disharmony between our purposes and nature.

What is sublime in nature frustrates us in our attempt to picture nature as receptive to our goals, moral or otherwise. Further, the sublime in nature suggests that nature is altogether devoid of purpose.

...in what we are wont to call sublime in nature there is such an absence of anything leading to particular objective principles and corresponding forms in nature, that it is rather in its chaos, or in its wildest and most irregular disorder and desolation, provided it gives signs of magnitude and power, that nature chiefly excites the ideas of the sublime (§23, 246).

Insofar as it is an aesthetic experience provoked by what is “wild and irregular” in nature, then, the sublime involves a feeling of the gulf between freedom and nature.

The experience of the sublime, because it involves an attitude of mind resembling respect for the moral law, however, can help bridge the felt aspect of the gulf between freedom and nature. To be sure, the sublime suggests nothing about *nature* that would help us here. Nature appears formless and capricious to us in the experience of the sublime. But the disposition of mind required to so much as appreciate sublimity in nature strongly resembles moral feeling, and this can help with the feeling that nature is at odds with our goals. To the extent that the experience of the sublime allows us to feel the resources of morality within us, it encourages moral resolve in us in the face of nature’s great might and magnitude. This attitude of moral resolve, in turn, can inspire in us a kind of pious hope regarding the possibility of realizing our moral goals in nature. I turn now to a more detailed exposition of the claim that the experience of the sublime can help with the gulf between freedom and nature in the ways just mentioned.

Because the feeling of the sublime strongly resembles moral feeling (respect) it has the effect of strengthening our moral resolve in the face of nature's overwhelming magnitude and might. By "moral resolve" here I just mean the attitude of mind of one who has resolved to place morality and its principles above sensible interests, and who is in this way able to regard the things of nature as small in comparison with our capacity for morality. One who is in the grip of sublime emotions feels empowered to resist nature, not directly through physical force, but by resolutely keeping the superiority of practical reason over nature in mind. The experience of the sublime gives us the feeling that we are actually superior to the might of nature from the point of view of morality.

The attitude of mind produced by the sublime, because it strengthens our moral resolve in the sense described above, can inspire a kind of pious hope regarding the possibility of realizing the goals of morality in nature. By "pious" hope I mean the hope of one who adopts an attitude of humility in the face of the inscrutability of nature, and for whom the superiority of practical reason over nature is plain. It is clear that the experience of the sublime cannot be a direct source of hope regarding the possibility of an ultimate harmony between freedom and nature. But the radical change in our own cast of mind effected by the sublime can provoke another, more restrained, kind of hope in us. As Kant explains, the disposition of mind required to appreciate the sublime gives one the sense of being "...raised above the dread of the operations of nature, in which he no longer sees God pouring forth the vials of the wrath" (§28,264).

Let us look again at the disposition of mind of one who is contemplating the sublime. Kant holds that the state of mind of one who experiences nature as sublime is analogous to respect for the moral law. Indeed, as we have seen, it is this disposition of

the mind itself, in which practical reason is regarded as superior to nature, that Kant claims is sublime in the strictest sense of the term. One thing this analogy suggests is that the experience of the sublime can aid in the struggle of one who exhibits an upright moral disposition to live up to the demands of the moral law, in spite of the many impediments to the fulfillment of that demand that arise from the sensible side of our nature.

Additionally, because the state of mind of one who contemplates the sublime is like that of one who exhibits respect for the moral law, the sublime reminds us of the “self-overcoming” characteristic of respect for the moral law. For this reason, Kant often includes “sublime conduct” among the things that we judge to be sublime. One example of this, which I considered earlier, is the sublime conduct of the soldier whose “mind is above the threats of danger” in battle (§28,262).

Respect, for Kant, is a tribute that we “strive to resist” paying because it “strikes down pride” in us (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:77). It is only with difficulty that we learn to respect the good in others. It is difficult because it involves the humiliation of our own self-conceit. The good conduct of another person “...holds before me a law that strikes down my self-conceit when I compare it with my conduct, and I see observance of that law and hence its *practicability* proved before me in fact” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:77).

The fact that respect works against our tendency to be self-satisfied in this way makes it, and by extension the sublime, a difficult achievement. Most simply put, both the sublime and respect require of us a high degree of selflessness. It also requires in us a susceptibility to moral ideas. In respect, for Kant, we subordinate the incentives of sensibility to the moral law and experience this as a “positive” feeling only to the extent

that we recognize that the ends of morality are thereby furthered. For this reason, we will only see respect exhibited by one who has learned to place the moral law above the incentives arising from sensibility. Similarly, the sublime requires of us that we are attentive to moral ideas, and that we are prepared to regard both internal and external nature as insignificant in comparison with those ideas. Kant observes that "...without the development of moral ideas, that which, thanks to preparatory culture, we call sublime, would merely strike the untutored man as terrifying" (§29,265).

Insofar as the experience of the sublime encourages moral resolve in us, and makes us attentive to the superiority of practical reason over nature, it can help mitigate the anxiety over the relationship between freedom and nature that forms part of Kant's "great gulf." Though the sublime gives us no insight into the hidden workings of nature that might help to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature, it does give us a powerful felt experience of the resources of morality within us. This feeling of our own freedom brings with it the conviction that we possess a "power of resistance" that is outside the order of nature, and "...gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature" (§28,261). So the experience of the sublime can at least help with the "felt gulf" between freedom and nature to this extent; by allowing us to feel the supersensible faculty of reason within us, it increases our moral resolve in the face of threatening nature.

The experience of the sublime can also inspire hope in us concerning the question of a possible harmony between the ends of nature and the ends of freedom. This point is somewhat more difficult to see than the one about moral resolve. Since the sublime is an aesthetic experience provoked by precisely those things in nature that strongly *resist* the

fulfillment of our goals, how could it at the same time be a source of hope regarding an ultimate harmony between the ends of freedom and nature?

The experience of the sublime, for Kant, provokes a change in our disposition towards ourselves and towards nature. One aspect of this change of disposition is an increase in moral resolve. If in the face of nature's great might and magnitude we are made aware of our own capacity for morality, we feel ourselves emboldened by this awareness. But the sublime also changes our attitude towards nature. One obvious way it does this is that it gives us a feeling of superiority over nature from the point of view of practical reason. In the sublime, for Kant, we "...become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also nature without us (as exerting influence upon us)" (§28,264).

The feeling of superiority over external nature Kant mentions here has been the focus of much criticism of Kant's aesthetics. The notion that the experience of the sublime in nature results in a feeling of our superiority over nature is not one that is likely to appeal to contemporary sensibilities, and may appear especially repellent to those with a commitment to some form of environmentalism. What I would like to suggest is that the attitude towards nature Kant actually describes in his account of the sublime, if looked at in light of his overarching project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature, is one of hopefulness restrained by humility.²¹ The feeling of the superiority of practical

²¹ Suspicion regarding Kant's apparently anthropocentric attitude towards nature in the sublime is not entirely unfounded, but can be carried too far. Rudolf Beiner, for example, calls Kant's account of the sublime "an apotheosis of Western subjectivism," and adds that "It is difficult to imagine a more total abasement of natural being as such in the face of our autonomy in relation to nature."²¹ Perhaps. It is certainly right to point out that Kant's account of the sublime elevates the human over the natural from the point of view of practical reason. And it is true that Kant's more general position regarding the relation of the human to the natural is anthropocentric. As he writes in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, Kant holds that "Without man...the whole of creation would be a mere wilderness" (§86,442).

reason to internal and external nature makes us hopeful, while the awareness of the self-sacrifice necessary to live up to the demands of practical reason humbles us.

Additionally, we are aware that nature, insofar as it is formless and random, is bound to remain inscrutable to us.

A consideration of Kant's overall view regarding the relation of the human to the natural is outside the scope of this chapter. My point here is that we shouldn't rush to the conclusion that Kant's position in the "Analytic of the Sublime" necessarily entails an ultimate superiority of the human over the natural. What Kant says is that the sublime gives us a feeling of superiority over nature "...so far as the latter can have any bearing upon our feeling of well being" (General Remark, 269). That is to say, we feel confident that nature has no dominion over our own moral resources.

This confidence, in turn, can be a source of a guarded hope regarding the ultimate relation between the ends of freedom and nature. The basis for this hope stems from the vivid awareness of the moral law that the experience of the sublime provides us with. As Kant reminds us in the Introduction to the third *Critique*, the moral law is meant to be actualized in nature. Since the moral law demands of us that we work for the actualization of moral ends in the world, a strengthening of what I have been calling moral resolve plausibly brings with it an increased confidence that so urgent a requirement *can be carried out*.²²

Although the sublime brings us face to face with what is most forbidding to us about nature, and even gives us what amounts to an experience of the gulf between

freedom and nature, the increase in moral resolve that accompanies our awareness of the superiority of practical reason over nature in judgments of the sublime, at the same time, provides us with a guarded hope that the gulf between freedom and nature is not an absolute one.

The experience of the sublime, on its own, cannot solve the problem about freedom and nature. Indeed, as we have seen, Kant himself suggests that the sublime is far less important for our inquiry into possible ends of nature than is the beautiful. This is largely because the sublime gives us no sign from nature's side that we can expect an ultimate harmony between freedom and nature. In coming chapters I consider the role of our experience of beauty in Kant's project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature. As I hope to show, our experience of beauty, and especially natural beauty, complements the moral resolve we gain from the experience of the sublime by revealing a point of view from which it is legitimate to regard nature as purposive for us.

²² This reflects Kant's position in the second *Critique* that "ought implies can." That is, since we are incontrovertibly aware of the moral law and its command through our "conscience," we are assured that we have the requisite freedom to carry out the demands of the law.

The Moral Significance of Natural Beauty

I. Introduction

I argue in this chapter that Kant's views about the moral significance of natural beauty, expressed most fully in §42 of the *Critique of Judgment*, are a crucial part of his effort to show how aesthetic reflective judgment helps us to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature. There are two main contributions that Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful makes to his overarching theme in the *Critique of Judgment* of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature. First, Kant's account shows how the principle of purposiveness, a regulative principle of judgment that instructs us to view nature as if it were a work of art, can emerge out of our reflections concerning beautiful forms as

products of nature. Natural beauty, for Kant, shows us the possibility of viewing nature as if it were a work of art without actually attributing design to nature. Thus Kant's approach to teleological judgment, according to which purposiveness becomes a "law judgment gives to and for itself" in order to orient itself in nature, is shown to arise out of "profound inquiries" inspired by nature's beauty.

The second contribution Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful makes to his theme of bridging the gap between freedom and nature is more straightforward. Nature's beautiful forms, which seemed to be designed with our contemplative pleasure in mind, lead us to hope that nature's ends and our own ends, and in particular our moral ends, are in harmony. An interest in natural beauty has moral significance, for Kant, because it has its source in a prior interest reason has in finding nature hospitable to our moral ends.

I conclude this chapter with a brief comparison of the picture of the relationship between freedom and nature that emerges from Kant's discussion of the sublime, and that suggested by what Kant says about natural beauty. I highlight the importance of Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful for making the transition from a discussion of aesthetic judgment to one of teleological judgment, and argue that §42 contains some of Kant's most crucial insights concerning the role aesthetic judgment plays in bridging the gulf between freedom and nature.

In the last chapter we saw how, for Kant, judgments of the sublime could amount to an aesthetic experience symbolizing the primacy of practical reason. Kant claims that in our reflections concerning nature's great magnitudes (mathematical sublime), and tremendous force (dynamical sublime), our imperviousness to both from the point of

view of practical reason is made vivid to us. Kant thus attempted to show that when we measure ourselves against nature's manifestations of might and magnitude in reflective judgment we have an aesthetic experience that makes us intensely aware of the self sufficiency of our moral natures.

But Kant also holds that "the concept of the sublime in nature is far less important and rich in consequences than that of its beauty" (§23,246). Because the sublime does not suggest to us the possibility of "anything final in nature itself," but only to "...the possible *employment* of our intuitions of it in inducing a feeling in our own selves of a finality quite independent of nature," the theory of the sublime is, for Kant, "a mere appendage to the aesthetic estimate of the finality of nature" (§23,246). Again, whereas the sublime involves an "esteem" akin to respect for our capacity to frame moral principles and act according to them "even in opposition to our (sensible) interest," the beautiful predisposes us to disinterestedly love nature (*General Remark on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments*, 267).

The main point of Kant's comparison of the sublime with natural beauty in §23 is that, for him, the existence of natural beauty directly affects our attitude towards the natural world in a way that the sublime does not. More specifically, the existence of beautiful forms in nature, while not adding to our *knowledge* of nature, does engender in us reflections about the origin of natural beauty that ultimately prove fruitful in helping to form a symbolic image of our relationship to nature. As Kant puts it,

Self-subsisting natural beauty reveals to us a technic of nature which shows it in the light of a system ordered in accordance with laws the principle of which is not to be found within the entire range of our faculty of understanding. This principle is that of a finality

relative to the employment of judgment in respect of phenomena which have thus to be assigned, not merely to nature regarded as aimless mechanism, but also to nature regarded after the analogy of art. Hence it gives a veritable extension, not, of course, to our knowledge of Objects of nature, but to our conception of nature as art- an extension inviting profound inquiries as to the possibility of such a form (§23,246).

Kant is pointing out here, among other things, that natural beauty awakens us to the possibility of regarding nature as if it were a work of art, while at the same time we fully realize that the purposiveness we find in natural beauty cannot be attributed to an actual plan of nature. More specifically, Kant links the contemplation of natural beauty to the discovery of an a priori principle by which judgment orients itself with regard to nature; a principle which Kant terms the “principle of the purposiveness of nature” (Introduction V, 184). Roughly, this means that Kant takes the existence of natural beauty to be both suggestive of the possibility of regarding nature as a system of ends, and, as we shall see, of the solution to questions we are inevitably led to ask about a possible final end of nature, questions which Kant treats in a much more thorough way in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*.

Commenting on the task of showing that the two halves of the third *Critique* form a unified work, John Zammito remarks that “the most important point for the unity of the third *Critique* is to show how the problem of teleological judgment arises immanently out of the problem of aesthetic judgment, i.e., out of the “objective subreption” which particularly attends the discernment of beauty in nature.”²³ The “objective subreption” Zammito is referring to here is “...the tendency to ascribe to the object itself the property which entailed beauty, even though according to Kant beauty resides in the

²³ John Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 151.

response of the subject... .”²⁴ Zammito’s interpretation of Kant’s account of natural beauty is that the “objective subreption” occasioned by natural beauty becomes the point of departure for his treatment of the purposiveness of nature in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*. As Zammito puts it,

The tendency to “objective subreption” is a natural error of judgment, yet Kant believed it might-not within the aesthetic experience as such, but subsequently, as a matter for reflection-be the source of “profound inquiries.” The “purposiveness of nature” aroused an “intellectual interest” after, and on account of, a purely aesthetic discernment of beauty in nature.²⁵

Kant writes in the published Introduction to the third *Critique* that natural beauty “may ...be looked on as the *presentation* of the concept of formal, i.e. merely subjective, finality and *natural ends* as the presentation of the concept of a real, i.e. objective finality” (Introduction, VIII, 193). Kant calls natural beauty a presentation of *subjective* purposiveness because in the beauty of natural forms we are given representations that correspond to the concept of a “harmony” between the form of the object and the subject’s cognitive powers (Introduction, VII, 192). In this way Kant explains the basis for his division of the third *Critique* into the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* and the *Critique of Teleological Judgment* (Introduction, VII, 193). So, importantly, it appears that both halves of the third *Critique* can be seen as explications of the concept of purposiveness. The *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* contains Kant’s account of subjective purposiveness, while the *Critique of Teleological Judgment* yields an account of objective purposiveness.

²⁴ Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, p.151.

²⁵ Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, p.151.

If there is to be a substantive link, then, between Kant's respective treatments of aesthetic and teleological judgment, a good place to start looking for it would be his discussion of the principle of the purposiveness of nature. Kant holds that this principle is applied "subjectively" in the case of aesthetic judgments. In teleological judgment, on the other hand, the principle is employed in a way that allows us to view nature as a system of ends. One place in the third *Critique* that we can discern a clear connection between these two types of judgment is in Kant's discussion of the contemplation of natural beauty in §42.

Following Zammito, I believe Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful in §42 is best read as part of an unfolding discussion of the moral significance of natural beauty that begins with his remark in §23 concerning the way in which the beauty of nature "gives a veritable extension" to "our conception of nature" by suggesting to us the possibility of viewing nature as if it were a work of art (§23,246).²⁶ As Zammito remarks, this is an important passage because it "suggests that, insofar as we reflect upon the beauty of nature as given ("objective"), we impute to nature a form of ordering utterly distinct from that of mechanistic causality."²⁷ Specifically, we are led to form a conception of nature, opposed to the mechanistic conception, according to which nature is viewed as if it were a work of art. This new conception of nature leads, in turn, to "profound inquiries" concerning the possibility of regarding nature as a system of ends in the first place (§23,246).

²⁶ For similar interpretations of Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful see Salim Kemal, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory: An introduction*. New York: St.Martins,1992, pp. 128-135; and Donald Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974, pp.147-149. I focus on Zammito's interpretation here because it is explicitly concerned with the relationship between Kant's discussion of natural beauty and the later sections on teleology.

Importantly, Kant is not claiming that natural beauty is *evidence* for a designer of nature. Indeed, Kant holds that natural beauty is not even evidence of actual purposes in nature in the way that organisms turn out to be.²⁸ Plainly, then, Kant is not arguing that natural beauty on its own lends credence to “physico-theology” or the argument from design. Strictly speaking our tendency to link natural beauty to a “technic of nature” (nature seen as if it were a work of art) is, as Zammito points out, a mistake of judgment of the sort Kant terms “subreption.” More positively, though, it gives rise to a conception of nature that serves as an alternative to the mechanistic conception of nature basic to natural science. This particular mistake of judgment, then, turns out to be a useful point of departure for inquiries into the possibility of viewing nature teleologically.

Kant had earlier considered another, less fruitful, subreption to which we are prone. He called our tendency to call objects of nature sublime, when what is really sublime is “the idea of humanity within us” a subreption (§27,257). The subreption in the case of natural beauty, for Kant, consists in attributing to nature “actual ends” on the basis of the “subjective purposiveness” of a judgment of taste. As Kant writes in §58, “The beautiful forms displayed in the organic world all plead eloquently on the side of the realism of the aesthetic finality of nature in support of the plausible assumption that beneath the production of the beautiful there must lie a preconceived idea in the producing cause—that is to say an *end* acting in the interest of our imagination” (§58,347). Though Kant ultimately warns against succumbing to the “eloquent plea” made by natural

²⁷ Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, p.152.

²⁸ Salim Kemal makes this point particularly clearly. He writes, “Kant is not claiming that nature is constructed by a deliberate act but that we can conceive of nature not only as a mechanism but also as bearing some design. For methodological reasons we think of nature *as if* it were created by an understanding *like ours for our understanding*. We think of this heuristic device of the idea of God as

beauty on behalf of the “realism of the aesthetic finality of nature,” Kant nonetheless recognizes, as Zammito points out, that our very tendency to think this way prepares the way for “profound inquiries” concerning the possibility of viewing nature *as if* it were a work of art.²⁹

Kant’s scattered remarks regarding the importance of natural beauty need to be taken into account in attempting to understand the main points of his account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful in §42. Though it is possible to read §42 as a thesis turning on a certain analogy Kant purports to have discovered between moral and aesthetic judgment, I think that to do so is to miss the rich implications of Kant’s account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful. My position, developed below, is that this analogy, on its own, does not explain the intellectual interest in the beautiful. Rather, I argue, the analogy is introduced into the discussion of the intellectual interest in the beautiful to show why we are justified in assuming the presence of good moral character in a person who displays an intellectual interest in natural beauty. The analogy, however, does not exhaust either the explanation, or the moral significance, of the intellectual interest in the beautiful.

II. Natural Beauty and Moral Character

In §42 of the *Critique of Judgment* Kant argues that taking an immediate interest in the existence of beautiful forms in nature can be taken to be a sign of good moral

‘divine wisdom’ or as ‘nature as the source of purposiveness in the world’ (Kemal, *Kant’s Aesthetic Theory*, 130).

²⁹ Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, p.151.

character. For Kant, a similar interest in the products of art is no such indication. Before examining Kant's argument for the claim that an interest in natural beauty can be linked to good moral character, we need to think about just what Kant means by "interest" here. In §41, Kant defines interest as "pleasure in the real existence of an object" (§41,296). Kant first of all reminds us that a judgment of taste cannot be based on any interest at all if it is to be a pure aesthetic judgment (§41,297). Instead, pure judgments of taste are "unconcerned with the real existence" of the object judged to be beautiful (§2,205).

But even though pure judgments of taste are disinterested judgments, Kant continues, there is nothing to prevent a judgment of taste from being connected "indirectly" with an interest (§41,297). Kant discusses two kinds of interest that may be connected to judgments of taste; empirical interests and intellectual interests. In both cases, for Kant, a pure judgment of taste is brought into conjunction with some broader concern of ours.

In the case of the empirical interest in the beautiful, which Kant discusses in §41, we take an interest in beauty due to our natural interest in sociability. Human beings are, for Kant, "creatures intended for society;" consequently, we have a strong inclination to promote "whatever enables us to communicate even our *feeling* to everyone else" (§41,297). This natural tendency to view the object of a judgment of taste in light of its contribution to sociability expresses itself in the empirical interest in the beautiful.

In the intellectual interest in the beautiful, a judgment of taste is linked to an interest of practical reason. More specifically, it is connected to the interest

practical reason has in finding nature conducive to the actualization of moral ideas (§42,159). In this way the intellectual interest in the beautiful takes on a moral significance lacking in the case of the empirical interest, which is, Kant thinks, too closely bound up with inclination to provide anything other than an “ambiguous transition from the agreeable to the good” (§41,298). The problem is that an interest in the beautiful motivated by our natural tendency to sociability is susceptible to becoming “fused” with the “great variety of inclinations and passions” manifest in society. The connection revealed here between judgments of taste and inclination in the empirical interest in the beautiful makes it a poor candidate for revealing what link there might be between taste and the good (§41,298).

Kant thinks that the intellectual interest in the beautiful, however, does indicate a link between beauty and morality. As I read §42, there are two stages in Kant’s argument that an interest in natural beauty is linked to morality. First, Kant, by way of contrast, argues that the intellectual interest in the beautiful has its source in “character,” and not, as with the empirical interest, in natural inclination. Second, Kant argues that only a person of good moral character would take an intellectual interest in natural beauty.

Kant opens §42 with a consideration of an objection to the often held, and well intentioned, view that to take “an interest in the beautiful generally,” is a sign of “a good moral character” (§42,298). The objection is that experience seems to show the opposite, especially if the interest we have in mind is an interest in art objects. The often questionable moral character of “aesthetes,” Kant reasons, is well known. Such “virtuosi in matters of taste,” Kant argues, can even be expected to display bad

character because their attachment to beauty is oftentimes more an interest in their own position in society, or in their reputations, than it is an interest in beauty per se. It seems to be Kant's view, then, that an interest in art objects is, or is likely to be, an "empirical" interest that is susceptible to becoming mixed up with inclination.

It is important to note here that the immediate context for Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, at least at the outset, is a question about what an immediate interest in natural beauty might reveal about the character of the person who displays such an interest. Kant defines "character" in *Anthropology* §89 as "...that property of the will by which the subject has tied himself to certain practical principles which he has unalterably prescribed for himself by his own reason" (*Anthropology* §89,292). "Character," according to Kant, is at the heart of personality. It refers to what one freely makes of oneself, as opposed to what one is naturally (*Anthropology*, §89,292).

This contrast between what nature makes of us and our character, what we make of ourselves, has an important role to play in setting up Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful. The intellectual interest in the beautiful, precisely because it is an interest arising out of "practical principles" that one "unalterably prescribes for oneself" through reason, holds much more promise for Kant's project of linking taste to moral judgment than did the empirical interest in the beautiful. If Kant can show that an interest in natural beauty has its source in good moral character, then he will have uncovered a link between taste and the good that is not corruptible by natural inclination. Nature, Kant will argue, may impel us to take an

interest in beauty based on sociability, but only good moral character prepares us for the disinterested love of natural beauty.

But what is the connection supposed to be between good moral character and an interest in natural beauty? Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful begins with the following example. Consider an observer in some natural setting who "...alone (and without any intention of communicating his observation to others) regards the beautiful form of a wild flower, a bird, an insect...with love and admiration" (§42,299). Such a one "is not alone pleased with nature's product in respect of its form, but is also pleased at its existence, and is so without any charm of sense having a share in the matter, or without his associating with it any end whatsoever"(§42,299). Kant adds that if the admired forms were replaced by identical, but artificial, ones, the intellectual interest aroused by them would vanish. This is because "the thought that the beauty in question is nature's handiwork is a necessary component, indeed the "sole basis," of the sort of interest Kant is considering in §42.

Kant's example, repeated in a slightly different form at the end of §42, plays an important role in his explication of the intellectual interest in the beautiful. As I read Kant, the example is supposed to show us what the intellectual interest is, and the subsequent discussion of an analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment is primarily addressed to the question of in what respect the intellectual interest is a sign of good moral character.

But to fully understand Kant's example it is helpful to read in light of his earlier remarks about the significance of natural beauty for teleology. The passage in §23 in

which Kant claims that natural beauty allows us to nature “after the analogy of art” is especially significant in this regard. There Kant suggests that natural beauty, because it allows us to view nature as if it were a work of art, can serve as the point of departure for “profound inquiries” regarding the possibility of the appearance of finality in nature (§23,296). In §42 Kant expands on this theme; giving us both a more detailed explanation of the purported connection between natural beauty and teleological reflection, and uncovers an analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment which Kant will further exploit in his discussion of beauty as the symbol of morality.

Let us return for a moment to Kant’s example. As I see it, there are two important points about the intellectual interest in the beautiful to be gleaned from Kant’s example. The first is that the intellectual interest, unlike the empirical interest, is a solitary pleasure taken in the “real existence” of beautiful objects in nature, and is not as susceptible as the empirical interest to being mixed up with either the charms of sense or other interests of ours (§42,299). It is important for Kant that the intellectual interest is one which we have “no intention of communicating to others,” and that our attachment to the object of beauty in this case may be characterized as disinterested love.

This is important for Kant’s exposition in §42 because it gives him a psychological basis for distinguishing between the intellectual and the empirical interest in the beautiful. Kant’s explanation of this difference is that the empirical interest has its source in natural inclination, while the intellectual interest has an a

priori source in principles chosen according to the guidance of reason. As Kant will explain, the intellectual interest in the beautiful is a product of a virtuous disposition.

The second lesson to be gleaned from Kant's example is that the "sole basis" for an immediate interest in nature's beauty is the "thought that the beauty in question is nature's handiwork" (§42,299). Kant is not saying here that the interest in natural beauty is the result of comparing aesthetic and moral judgment and finding analogies there. Though Kant plainly thinks that there are such analogies, these analogies have far reaching implications for Kant's aesthetic theory, it is important to note that the analogies themselves are not the immediate cause of the intellectual interest in the beautiful for Kant. Instead, the intellectual interest is the result of being struck by the fact that beauty, which on Kant's account can only be recognized by human beings, exists in nature at all. That there is beauty in nature is striking because the purposiveness of natural beauty is a "purposiveness without purpose." From the point of view of theoretical reason, natural beauty cannot be said to result from an actual purpose of nature. When we describe a beautiful form in nature from the point of view of "science" its beauty gets left out of the description as irrelevant (at least on Kant's account). We do not discover, for example, that one of the functions of wildflowers is to "be beautiful." It may be the case that the particular qualities of the flowers that we respond to when we call them beautiful can be said to serve some other "purpose of nature," but their beauty cannot be explained this way. The purposiveness of beautiful forms in nature, for Kant "...is merely concerned in general with the apprehension of this form so far as it proves accordant in the mind with the *faculty* of concepts as well as with that of their presentation (which is

identical with that of apprehension)” (§30,279). So , though the beauty of natural forms serves no objective purpose whatsoever, such forms are purposive for our cognitive capacities in general.

This is significant from a moral point of view because, as Kant will explain, in his account of the analogy between aesthetic and moral judgment, practical reason has an interest in finding nature hospitable to our moral ends. As Salim Kemal puts it,

Kant may be said to show that the natural order can be conceived of as other than simply determined according to causal connections. It is conceived of as determined to certain ends. With the occurrence of natural beauty, nature exhibits a purposiveness directed to an accord with the harmonious relation of freely exercised rational faculties. Nature shows that it can have an end which is not antithetical to human ends and so is not indifferent to moral ends.³⁰

Following his example of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, Kant claims that natural beauty, precisely because it is capable of awakening the kind of immediate interest outlined above, is superior to artistic beauty from the point of view of practical reason. Artistic beauty cannot interest us in the same way because the beauty of artworks is not experienced as surprising, as Kant thinks natural beauty is. There is nothing unexpected about the bare fact that a work of art is pleasant to look at because beauty is a significant part of what fine art aims to accomplish.

The beauty of nature, on the other hand, is uniquely striking because it must be regarded by us as wholly unintended. The harmony between the way our cognitive faculties receive nature and nature’s free forms interests us because it gives us cause to hope that nature is not wholly indifferent to human ends (§58,350). For this reason, Kant remarks, “...it is the indispensable requisite of the interest which we here take in beauty,

that the beauty should be that of nature..." (§42,302). Kant's thought here seems to be something like this. There are really two judgments that take place whenever one takes an intellectual interest in the beauty of nature. The first is an aesthetic response to the beautiful form itself. This response issues in a judgment of taste such as "this snowy hillside is beautiful." The second judgment is a more complex, teleological judgment, about beauty in nature. In this judgment we express wonder at the fact that nature seems as if it were designed for our contemplative pleasure, even while realizing that beauty cannot be regarded as an objective end of nature. From the point of view of practical reason, this kind of reflection supports our hope that the ends of freedom and the ends of nature will prove harmonious. The interest we take in natural beauty is "intellectual" because it is the result of comparing the ideas and interests of morality with what we actually find in nature.³⁰ Importantly, then, Kant holds that the intellectual interest in the beautiful is not just the capacity to appreciate natural beauty, which is presumably a widely shared ability, but is a less common reflection that is based on the thought that "this beauty is a product of nature."

But what justifies Kant's claim that only persons of good character will be impressed by natural beauty? It is one thing to point out that natural beauty is capable of awakening a kind of interest that the beauty of art cannot, and even that it is possible to attach a moral significance to this interest, but Kant goes further and claims that natural beauty will only be of interest to someone of good moral character. What, exactly is the connection between good character and the interest in the beauty of nature supposed to be?

³⁰ Salim Kemal "The Importance of Artistic Beauty." *Kant Studien*, 74 (1983), p.501.

As I read Kant, this question is answered by Kant's appeal to an analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment; an analogy that he will develop further in the concluding sections of *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. The importance of this analogy for Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful has been down played by some commentators and overemphasized by others. Donald Crawford, for example, seems to underestimate the importance of Kant's analogy when he writes that it is "not to the point, in terms of the central argument of §42."³¹ Guyer, on the other hand, seems to see in Kant's analogy an explanation of the intellectual interest itself, as well as an answer to the question of why such an interest is morally significant for Kant.³²

Though I sympathize with Crawford's reaction to Kant's use of the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment in §42, I think he is wrong to dismiss it as easily as he does. The comparison between aesthetic and moral judgment is a crucial component of the main argument of §42 that an immediate interest in natural beauty is morally significant. But the analogy does not stand on its own as an explanation of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, as Guyer at times seems to want it to.

Kant's central point in §42 is that an immediate interest in natural beauty is morally significant in a way that a like interest in the beauty of art is not, and Kant's analogy helps to show how this can be the case. What the analogy cannot do, as I argue below, is explain why Kant holds that the thought that a certain representation is *nature's* beauty is a crucial part of the reflection that produces the intellectual interest in the beautiful. In order to understand this point, Kant's analogy needs to be read in light of

³¹ Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory*, p.148.

both his example of the intellectual interest, discussed above, and the other remarks concerning natural beauty which he makes in the third *Critique*. I now turn to an examination of Kant's analogy.

Kant's analogy between pure judgments of taste and moral feeling is presented as a response to the question of why we tend to esteem the love of natural beauty more highly than we do a similar love of the beauty of art. From the standpoint of taste alone, argues Kant, neither works of art nor natural beauty should be considered superior. But there are other grounds for holding that an interest in natural beauty is more admirable than an interest in the beauty of art. Kant argues that an interest in natural beauty is an extension of an interest in seeing the nature as harmonious with ideas of practical reason. That is, Kant explains the interest in natural beauty in terms of a prior moral interest we have in finding a harmonious relationship between nature and moral ends. An interest in natural beauty, for Kant, is dependent upon the presence of a virtuous disposition in the person responding to natural beauty. Kant argues that only one who was deeply interested in seeing moral ideas actualized in nature would respond to natural beauty with interest. No such claim can be made in the case of an interest in the beauty of art, for Kant, because such an interest is often motivated by merely empirical interests. Kant's analogy is supposed to explain the connection between the interest in natural beauty and the interest in the harmony of morality and nature.

Kant argues that judgments of taste and moral judgments are analogous in the following sense. The pleasure we take in the beautiful, for Kant, attaches to judgments

³² Guyer has written about Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful in numerous places. See especially *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.326-331; and *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, pp.265-71 and 310-314.

that are both disinterested and valid for everyone a priori. Similarly, moral feeling is produced by judgments that disinterestedly “determine an a priori delight which we make into a law for everyone” (§42,300).³³

But there are two important disanalogies between aesthetic and moral judgment for Kant. Moral judgments, unlike aesthetic ones, both involve a concept and produce an interest (§42,300). As Guyer puts it “...moral judgments, obviously, must employ the concept of universal legislation in order to estimate the forms of maxims; and only moral judgments can, without presupposing an interest, produce one.”³⁴ These disanalogies, which Kant will mention again in his later discussion of beauty as the symbol of morality, are important because they remind us that Kant’s project is not to reduce the aesthetic to the moral. Instead, Kant aims to show how the aesthetic can come to the aid of moral reflection in certain cases, and that there is a close link between moral and aesthetic education at both the individual and the societal level.

To return to the account of the intellectual interest, the next observation Kant makes is that practical reason has an interest in the “objective reality” of moral ideas. That is, reason is interested in any sign that the ends prescribed by moral ideas can be actualized in nature. Natural beauty, Kant contends, is just such a sign. But in what way does the existence of natural beauty provide us with a sign that nature is receptive to our moral goals?

We need to start with the observation that natural beauty, for Kant, is a “surprise.” More specifically, Kant supposes that it is surprising to find nature’s unintentional affects

³³ Kant extends this analogy in §59 on beauty as the symbol of morality. See chapter 4 for a fuller discussion of the analogies Kant draws between moral and aesthetic judgment.

in harmony with the requirements of our cognitive faculties. The fact that certain forms in nature provoke in us the free play of the cognitive faculties that is the basis for pure judgments of taste must be regarded by us to be a wholly contingent fact. That is, we cannot regard natural beauty as a purpose of nature. We can see why this is so if we consider Kant's explanation of the pleasure of judgments of taste. According to Kant's account of judgments of taste we experience aesthetic pleasure when we are conscious that a particular form displays "purposiveness without purpose." Our emotional response to such forms is characterized by Kant as a disinterested delight. So, on Kant's account, we do not find nature beautiful in cases where some product of nature answers a particular need of ours. Nor do we find nature beautiful when we reflect on the purpose of a given natural form. Instead, we find nature beautiful when some form in nature appears to be designed solely for our contemplative pleasure. So, for Kant, the thought that nature's beauty is an objective purpose of nature would actually prevent us from responding to beauty "aesthetically." That is, if beauty were an objective end of nature the response to beauty could no longer be regarded as having its basis in a subjective feeling about the forms in nature we take to be beautiful.

Kant holds that reason takes an interest in natural beauty because it suggests to us the possibility of regarding nature as if it were a work of art. This should not be misconstrued as an argument that natural beauty is evidence that nature is in fact a work of art. Kant does not think that natural beauty, on its own, supports the argument from design for the existence of God. What Kant thinks is that the surprising accord between our cognitive faculties and certain forms of nature will be of interest to one who is

³⁴ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste: Second Edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

interested in the actualization of moral ideas in nature. What reason is interested in this case is simply that in natural beauty there is a harmony between mere form in nature and the requirements of our cognitive faculties. When we take an interest in natural beauty we are interested in the harmony of freedom and nature that such beauty suggests. As Kant puts it, "... it is of interest to reason that nature should at least show a trace or give a hint that it contains in itself some ground or other for assuming a uniform accordance of its products with our wholly disinterested delight..." (§42,300).

The intellectual interest in the beautiful, for Kant, is morally significant because it is an extension of a more fundamental interest reason has in the actualization of moral ideas. Kant's idea here is something like the following. Practical reason is interested in any instance of a harmony between the end of nature and the ends of morality because such a harmony suggests the idea of an ultimate harmony between freedom and nature. The harmony between our cognitive faculties and nature in natural beauty, while not strictly speaking a case of the harmony of our moral ends with nature, does suggest to us a conception of nature according to which there is a harmony in general between our purposes in general and the purposes of nature. If we add to this the fact that, for Kant, moral and aesthetic judgment are analogous, we can begin to see why Kant thought that the intellectual interest in natural beauty can be traced to a prior interest of morality.

Since an interest in natural beauty is an extension of an interest in seeing moral ideas actualized in nature, an interest in natural beauty can be taken to be a sign of good moral character. Kant argues that only a person of good character, whose interests are in the first place "set deep in the foundations of the morally good," will take an immediate

interest in the unlooked for harmony between nature's "free forms" and our disinterested contemplation.

The above is Kant's explanation of the moral significance of the intellectual interest in the beautiful. The immediate interest we take in nature's beauty has moral importance because it can be traced to a more fundamental interest in the actualization of moral ideas in nature. The existence of "free beauty" in nature allows us to hope that freedom and nature are not ultimately incompatible. We can assume that someone who displays an interest in natural beauty has a virtuous disposition because its source is located in a prior moral interest.

Kant's argument that the intellectual interest in the beautiful is morally significant is not very convincing if it is read as an argument for the claim that an intellectual interest in the beautiful has intrinsic moral worth. Donald Crawford worries that,

...even given Kant's analysis of the nature and presuppositions of morality and the experience of the beautiful, the most this argument shows is that a moral interest results in an interest in the presence or existence of the beautiful forms of nature, as if they were designed for our faculties. It does not follow that an immediate interest in the beauties of nature implies a moral interest or the possession of moral feeling.³⁵

As Crawford also observes, though, Kant's immediate claims regarding the moral significance of natural beauty are nowhere near this strong. What Kant claims is that a person's immediate interest in natural beauty gives us "...reason for presuming the presence of at least the germ of a good moral disposition in the case of a man to whom the beauty of nature is a matter of immediate interest" (§42,301). Later Kant will remark

³⁵ Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetics*, p.148.

that our tendency to regard as “coarse” those who lack a feeling for nature’s beauty is also justified.

Neither of these claims suggests that Kant thought the argument of §42 showed that the intellectual interest in the beautiful *entails* a moral character on the part of the lover of nature. Kant claims, at most, that the lover of beauty is good material for a moral education; that is, we can rightly assume that the seed of a virtuous disposition lies in her.

Taken in the somewhat guarded way Kant presents them, I think Kant’s claims in §42 are supported by the arguments he offers. If it is true, as Kant thinks it is, that aesthetic and moral judgment are alike in significant ways, and that practical reason takes an interest in the actualization of our moral ideas in nature, then Kant’s modest claim that a person who displays an immediate interest in natural beauty is also likely to be virtuous, or at least predisposed to virtue, is a plausible one.

The problem, from a contemporary point of view, is that we are unlikely to be sympathetic to Kant’s analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment. In chapter four, on Kant’s account of beauty as the symbol of morality, I discuss Kant’s analogy in a more detailed way. There I argue that Kant’s analogy is a more complex and nuanced account than it is often taken to be, and that it should not be easily dismissed.

The important point here is that Kant’s discussion in §42 does not exhaust the significance of his analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment. As Guyer observes, the analogy is also important due to what it can reveal to us about “our own autonomy.”³⁶ Guyer claims that Kant’s analogy provides us with a way to represent to ourselves our capacity to “...attach a feeling of pleasure to the determination of our will independently

³⁶ Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, p.267.

of antecedent desire, without thereby presupposing a desire to be gratified and without turning that pleasure into the object of our will... .”³⁷ That is to say, the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment allows us a “symbol of our autonomy” that highlights the fact that moral feeling is not necessarily a threat to autonomy, and even has a positive role to play in our moral lives. More generally, it helps us to reconcile the seemingly disparate realms of nature and freedom in reflective judgment by showing us nature in the form of our feeling in harmony with our autonomy.

This feature of Kant’s analogy has far reaching consequences for an understanding of the place of emotion in his ethical theory which I cannot consider fully here. As Guyer argues, it shows that Kant need not be read, as he often has been, as indifferent, or even hostile, to the idea that feeling has any part to play in our moral lives.³⁸ My point in calling attention to Guyer’s interpretation of Kant’s analogy here is just that the significance of the analogy has only begun to be exploited by Kant in §42. As we will see, the real importance of Kant’s analogy becomes much clearer in the argument §59 that beauty is uniquely suited to becoming a symbol of morality.

In terms of understanding Kant’s argument that the intellectual interest in the beautiful is morally significant, though, I find Guyer’s reading somewhat misleading. Guyer both suppresses the link between aesthetic and teleological judgment purportedly revealed by natural beauty, and makes it seem as if Kant’s main intent in §42 is to discuss beauty as a symbol of morality. As I read §42, Kant’s primary concern is to show why an interest in natural beauty can be taken as a sign of good moral character. Kant’s answer to that question highlights at least two important features of the appreciation of natural

³⁷ Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, p.267.

beauty. The first is that the beautiful in nature awakens us to the possibility of viewing nature as if it were a work of art; secondly, Kant argues that the intellectual interest in the beautiful is an extension of a prior interest in the actualization of moral ideas.

When Kant later uses his analogy to show that beauty can serve as a symbol of morality he is making a different point. There he is concerned to show how the experience of beauty can be useful to the subject from the point of view of morality. More specifically, as Guyer contends, Kant's discussion in §59 is meant to show that, because aesthetic judgment and moral judgment are analogous, our reflection on the experience of beauty can serve to represent important features of our autonomy that might otherwise remain obscure. I am not saying that *no* such point can be gleaned from Kant's discussion in §42. It is just that concentrating on what the larger significance of the analogy Kant uses there might be risks suppressing important features of Kant's theory of the intellectual interest in the beautiful. Most importantly for my purposes here, it obscures the way in which natural beauty, by "extending our concept of nature," becomes part of an extended reflection concerning the finality of nature.

III. Natural Beauty and Teleology

In the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, Kant insists that the intellectual interest in natural beauty on its own cannot lend support to the view that there are objective ends in nature. Kant frames his discussion of this point in §58 in terms of a conflict between two assumptions which he calls "the realism of finality" and the "idealism of finality." The

³⁸ See especially Guyer's *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, pp. 27-40.

realism of finality is just the assumption that the appearance of purposiveness in nature's forms is the result of objective ends in nature. It is the thesis that nature really is purposive in respect of its beautiful forms. The idealism of finality is the thesis that the purposiveness we find in nature's beautiful forms is wholly due to our subjective response to these forms. It is the thesis that the purposiveness of nature's beautiful forms is wholly the result of our subjective apprehension of those forms, and the relation of nature's beautiful forms to our cognitive faculties is "independent of an end, spontaneous and contingent" (§58,347).

As we have seen, though Kant holds that we are strongly predisposed to regard natural beauty as an objective end of nature, we cannot do so apart from a further reflection concerning the appearance of purposiveness in nature. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, reason itself, with "...its maxims enjoining upon us in all cases to avoid, so far as possible, any unnecessary multiplication of principles..." strongly resists the claim that we must add a teleological principle in order to explain nature. Second, the mere fact that beautiful forms exist in nature does not warrant the assumption that beauty is an objective end of nature. Our scientific understanding of nature, for Kant, is not advanced at all by the fact that nature is beautiful, just as our scientific understanding of a beautiful flower is not advanced by the fact that we find looking at the flower pleasurable. Kant concludes that there is nothing about natural beauty itself from which we could legitimately infer objective purposes in nature.

The most important argument Kant advances against the assumption that natural beauty is an actual purpose of nature concerns a threat to the autonomy of aesthetic judgment. Since, for Kant, the standard for judging an object to be beautiful in the first

place are located in the subject (in the harmonious free play of the understanding and the imagination), we cannot explain natural beauty in terms of objective ends of nature. If we did explain natural beauty along these lines, Kant argues, then the standard of beauty would have to be located in an empirical concept of nature. This would amount to the view that beauty is a perfection of nature, and it is to nature that we would turn in order to decide whether a given object was beautiful or not. This would appear to make a judgment of taste an empirical judgment, a conclusion that Kant explicitly rejects on numerous occasions.

...in our general estimate of beauty we seek its standard *a priori* in ourselves... the aesthetic faculty is itself legislative in respect of the judgment whether anything is beautiful or not. This could not be so on the assumption of a realism of the finality of nature; because in that case we should have to go to nature for instruction as to what we should deem beautiful, and the judgment of taste would be subject to empirical principles (§58,350).

For the above reasons, Kant argues the inclination to regard beauty as an objective end of nature is misguided. Kant recognizes the “eloquence” with which natural beauty can speak to the sensitive soul, and even attaches moral worth to such sensitivity, but he ends up stressing that the purposiveness we find in nature’s beautiful forms must be regarded by us as “without purpose.” The moral significance of natural beauty lies in our manner of “receiving nature,” not in a thesis about how nature actually is. As Kant puts it, “...in such an estimate the question does not turn on what nature is, or even on what it is for us in the way of an end, but on how we receive it” (§58,350).

This does not mean that reflections about natural beauty cannot play a part in larger reflections about purposiveness in nature. Kant has already indicated a number of times that natural beauty helps to enlarge our conception of nature by encouraging us to think about nature as if it were a work of art. Kant's point in §58 is just that, though aesthetic judgment might in some way augment teleological judgment, judgments of taste concerning objects of nature imply nothing about beauty as an actual purpose of nature. Further, to think of nature's beauty as a purpose would threaten the autonomy of aesthetic judgment.

Kant, however, does provide a justification for thinking of natural beauty as if it were an objective end of nature in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*. Roughly, his argument is that since we find "organisms" in nature, and organisms cannot be explained relying on wholly mechanical principles, we can adopt the principle that nature can be regarded as if it were the product of an intelligence other than our own as a heuristic principle of judgment. Though organisms display only "intrinsic purposiveness" (a purposive relation between the parts of some object), the applicability of this principle of reflection extends to what he calls "extrinsic finality" (purposive relations between distinct objects in nature). In this way, Kant thinks he can justify viewing nature as a whole as if it were a system of ends.

When our interest in natural beauty is brought into connection with teleological reflections about extrinsic purposiveness in nature, we are, for Kant, entitled to think of natural beauty as if it were part of nature's system of purposes. In this way, the interest we take in natural beauty can serve to enlarge our conception of nature. This is not the same as saying that it extends our *knowledge* of nature. Kant remarks in the third

Critique's account of teleology that once the legitimacy of thinking of the world as if it were a "vast system of ends" has been established by teleological judgment "We may regard it as a favor that nature has extended to us, that besides giving us what is useful it has dispensed beauty and charms in such abundance, and for this we may love it, just as we view it with respect because of its immensity, and feel ourselves ennobled by such contemplation-just as if nature had erected and decorated its splendid stage with this precise purpose in mind" (§67,380).

Though this statement seems to contradict Kant's earlier assertion that natural beauty has to be conceived as wholly a matter of how we receive nature, and not a matter of objective purposes in nature, the contradiction here is only apparent. Kant's idea is that, though no thought of nature's purposiveness enters into our aesthetic response to nature itself, that response, when viewed in connection with teleological reflections that are justified on other grounds, leads us to think of natural beauty as if it were an objective end of nature. Kant himself comments on this apparent contradiction in a footnote to the above citation.

In the Part on Aesthetics the statement was made: *we regard nature with favour*, because we take a delight in its form that is altogether free (disinterested). For in this judgment of mere taste no account is taken of any end for which these natural beauties exist: whether to excite pleasure in us, or irrespective of us as ends. But in a teleological judgment we pay attention to this relation; and so we can *regard it as a favour of nature*, that it has been disposed to promote our culture by exhibiting so many beautiful forms (§67,381,fn).

So the view Kant defends about the purposiveness of beautiful objects of nature in §42 and §58 needs to be revised in light of the possibility of viewing nature as a system of extrinsic ends. Let us review Kant's earlier claims about natural beauty before moving on

to a consideration of just how his account of teleology modifies those claims. Though the thought of a possible purposiveness of nature does not enter into the pure judgment of taste itself, that judgment may arouse an intellectual interest where the beauty in question is the beauty of nature. Kant, as we have seen, views the intellectual interest in natural beauty as an extension of an interest of practical reason. More specifically, it is an extension of practical reason's interest in the harmony of the ends of freedom and the ends of nature. Still, there is nothing in the intellectual interest in natural beauty that entitles us to think of beauty as an objective end of nature. Indeed, Kant argues that to think of natural beauty in this way would be to make a perfection of nature the standard of beauty, and the judgment of taste an empirical judgment.

In the *Critique of Teleological Judgment* Kant shows how the intellectual interest in natural beauty can become part of a series of teleological reflections about relations between objects in nature. Kant claims, first, that one cannot comprehend the internal relations between the parts of organisms without appealing to a principle of teleology.³⁹ The principle of teleology to which we must appeal in the case of organisms is a reflective principle. This means, for Kant, that it is a principle that we apply as a regulative maxim when thinking about organisms. Kant further argues that once the necessity of relying on the teleological principle for the estimation of organisms is demonstrated, then we are entitled to apply the principle of teleology to nature as a

³⁹ I do not attempt to evaluate, or even to fully present, Kant's argument here. My aim is merely to show the way in which certain aspects of Kant's account of teleology bear on the question of whether, for Kant, natural beauty can be considered an objective end of nature.

whole.⁴⁰ Kant claims that natural beauty can then be thought of, in light of this conception of nature, as if it were objective end of nature.

Kant also claims, in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, that natural beauty can serve as a point of departure for our reflections about a possible purposiveness of nature. When Kant, in §42, describes beauty as a “...feast for the soul in a train of thought that can never be completely evolved” he suggests that the beauty of nature moves us to reflect on the possibility of conceiving of nature as a system of ends, and of beauty as an end of nature (§42,300). Natural beauty, for Kant, is important for the further reflections about our relationship to nature it can inspire.⁴¹ As Zammito observes, natural beauty, on Kant’s account, reveals a fruitful approach to questions of teleology that is an extension of judgment’s application of the subjective principle of purposiveness.

Importantly, the principle of purposiveness is a merely regulative principle for Kant. More specifically, it is a heuristic principle by means of which we view the great variety of empirical laws left undetermined by the universal laws of nature as if they

⁴⁰ Kant’s claim here is that our investigation of organisms reveals a “capacity in nature” for producing objects that can only be “thought by us according to final causes” (§67,381). Once this capacity of nature’s has been “discovered,” we may legitimately think of nature as if it were a system of ends.

⁴¹ Kant makes an even stronger claim in the Preface to the second version of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which he connects the contemplation of natural beauty with the belief in an author of nature. There he argues that the demolition of all speculative proofs for the existence of God, which Kant presumed he had accomplished in the first *Critique*, would in no way affect the rationally based “convictions” of the ordinary believer because “...the belief in a wise and great *Author of the world* is generated solely by the glorious order, beauty, and providential care everywhere displayed in nature” (Kant, *Pure Reason*, Bxxxiii). That is, it is nature’s beauty, and not the speculative proofs for God’s existence offered by traditional metaphysics, that inclines us to think that nature unfolds according to a divine plan. Nevertheless, Kant does not endorse the argument from design. The above account of the relation between natural beauty and the thought of God is an account of the origin of the “ordinary” belief in an author of nature, not a proof that an author exists. Kant characterizes the belief itself as a “rationally based conviction,” which, as he explains in the second and third *Critiques*, means that a belief in a moral author of the world, because it is necessary in the interests of practical reason, is rationally justifiable. But this belief will never become knowledge; it remains essentially a matter of conviction.

formed a system designed, by an understanding other than our own, with our cognitive capacities in mind. As Kant puts it in the published introduction to the third *Critique*,

...the principle sought can only be this: as universal laws of nature have their ground in our understanding, which prescribes them to nature (though only according to the universal concept of it as nature), particular empirical laws must be regarded, in respect of that which is left undetermined in them by these universal laws, according to a unity such as they would have if an understanding (though it be not ours) had supplied them for the benefit of our cognitive faculties ... (Introduction, IV, 181).

The principle of the purposiveness of nature, for Kant, is a rule prescribed by judgment “for and to itself” that instructs us to view nature as if its great variety of empirical laws were a systematic unity designed by an understanding other than our own. Additionally, since from the point of view of theoretical reason such an order of nature has to be regarded as wholly contingent, Kant claims that “...the discovery...that two or more empirical heterogeneous laws of nature are allied under one principle that embraces them both, is the ground of a very appreciable pleasure, often even of admiration... (Introduction, VI, 187). Kant claims that we respond with pleasure to whatever “makes us attentive in our estimate of nature to its finality for our understanding,” and find the suggestion of counterpurposiveness in nature displeasing (Introduction, VI, 188).

One of the lessons of Kant’s theory of the intellectual interest in the beautiful is that the subjective purposiveness that is characteristic of beautiful forms in nature, when viewed in light of the fact that beautiful forms do exist in nature, can serve as the point of departure for teleological reflections. Later, as we saw above, Kant argues that once the legitimacy of the reflective principle of teleology is established natural beauty can even be regarded (reflectively) as an objective end of nature.

Let us consider again Kant's account of the act of reflecting on natural beauty. Reflecting about the beauty of nature, because it suggests the possibility of regarding nature as an artist, is itself pleasurable. In addition to the aesthetic pleasure that attaches to the pure judgment of taste concerning beautiful forms in nature, we find the mere suggestion of a finality of nature which such forms convey to us pleasurable. This is true despite the fact that we are aware that natural beauty is in no way *evidence* for either design in nature's specific forms, or for the existence of a final end of nature as a whole.⁴²

Kant had already indicated a connection between aesthetic and teleological judgment in §30, where he wrote that "With regard the beautiful in nature... we may start a number of questions touching on the cause of the finality of their forms: e.g. How are we to explain why nature has scattered beauty abroad with so lavish a hand, even in the depths of the ocean where it can but seldom be reached by the eye of man- for which alone it is final" (§30,279). This indicates the direction of the "profound inquiries" that Kant takes to arise out of the contemplation of natural beauty. Primarily, such inquiries concern the source of the purposiveness that we encounter in nature.

Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, then, shows a close link between the aesthetic response to, and subsequent reflection about, beauty in nature and teleological judgment. This connection is developed further in Kant's discussion of teleological judgment, in which he claims that once we are operating with a picture of nature as a system of ends we are entitled to regard natural beauty as if it were an end of

⁴² Reflections about natural beauty may augment teleological reflections about extrinsic purposiveness in nature, but even in this case natural beauty is not evidence of design because the teleological judgment it is brought into connection with is itself reflective and not determinative.

nature; a reflection not warranted by our initial aesthetic response to the appearance of subjective purposiveness in nature's forms.

IV. Natural Beauty as a Bridge between Freedom and Nature

Having examined Kant's reasons for holding that the appreciation of natural beauty has a special moral significance, it remains to be seen just what role the account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful might play in Kant's overarching theme in the third *Critique* of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature through reflective judgment. One thing I aim to show in this paper is that there is not just one way this bridging takes place. That is, Kant is not attempting to construct a single theory that will culminate in a conclusive resolution of the problems about freedom and nature raised in the introduction. Rather, Kant details various kinds of reflective activity that help to mitigate the anxiety of the following question: What if it turns out that nature, which after all, following Kant's first *Critique*, must be conceived of *mechanistically*, is wholly inhospitable to our moral ends? This question, though it is part of the stated theme of the work, does not appear to be answered definitively in the third *Critique*.

The closest Kant comes to a conclusive statement regarding the problematic relationship between the realms of freedom and nature occurs in the closing sections of *The Critique of Teleological Judgment*, where Kant offers a moral proof for the existence of God, and defends a position of rational faith reminiscent of the Postulates of Practical Reason section of the second *Critique*. If we take Kant's moral proof for the existence of God as the answer to the question about freedom and nature posed in the introduction of the third *Critique*, however, the answer is somewhat unsatisfying. We are, at the end of

the third *Critique*, more or less thrown back on the position of the second that God, freedom, and immortality are necessary postulates of practical reason.

If, on the other hand, Kant is answering the question about freedom and nature all along by showing how various activities of reflective judgment all contribute to the task of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature, then the answer becomes much more interesting. In that case, Kant appears to be saying that we do not require, nor can there be, an *argument* to show that nature is receptive to our moral goals. Rather, we need only attend to the fact that nature can be interpreted (reflectively) as in harmony with our moral goals. Thus, as Kant puts it, everything depends, not on the way nature is, but on the way we “receive nature.” Our aesthetic experience of nature allows us to hope that freedom and nature will prove harmonious because it yields various symbols of freedom and nature cooperating.

In this way the third *Critique* can be read as a partial response to what, for Kant, is one of the great questions motivating philosophy, “What may I hope?”⁴³ For Kant, it is important to ask what we may legitimately hope for, given the limitations placed on our prospects for knowledge concerning a possible final purpose of nature. But what contribution does Kant think an interest in natural beauty make towards answering this question?

Salim Kemal observes that natural beauty, on Kant’s account “...is based on a unity between man and nature in which the rigid ‘otherness’ of the latter is lessened to a

⁴³ See Kant’s *Logic*, trans. Robert S. Hartman and Wolfgang Schwartz, New York: Dover Publications, 1974, p.29. Kant discusses the three great questions posed by philosophy on many occasions, most notably at B 833 in the first *Critique*, but here he adds a fourth. The questions are: 1. What can I know 2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope? 4. What is man? Kant concludes that “At bottom all this could be reckoned to be anthropology, because the first three questions are related to the last.

point where its beauty inspires a feeling akin to the moral.”⁴⁴ Kant thinks that natural beauty will be striking to someone already interested in moral ideas and their actualization in nature because beauty in nature seems as if it was designed for our purely disinterested delight. Kant makes the link to his account of teleology in his *Critique of Teleological Judgment* explicit when he argues that natural beauty “...lends great weight to the mode of explanation which assumes actual ends of nature in favour of our aesthetic judgment” (§58,348).

For Kant, natural beauty tempts us to think that some natural forms actually are designed with our aesthetic pleasure in mind. This has moral significance, for Kant, because we have an interest rooted in practical reason in any accord between the “free products of nature” and the requirements of our cognitive faculties. In the case of natural beauty, the harmony between our cognitive faculties and nature’s forms is so unexpected, and inspiring, that we are strongly inclined to accept it as evidence that the beauty of nature really has been created for us. And, though we are precluded from regarding the beauty of nature as in fact intended by nature, such beauty does reveal to us the principle of purposiveness that legislates over the faculty of judgment. This, in turn, awakens us to the possibility of an interpretation of nature according to which an ultimate harmony between moral ends and the ends of nature obtains.

From a theoretical point of view, as we have seen, we do not need teleology to explain the existence of natural beauty. The forms which we admire in nature can be fully explained along mechanistic lines, and nature’s beauty can be regarded as a fortuitous accident. But from the point of view of practical reason the case is somewhat

⁴⁴ Salim Kemal, “The Importance of Artistic Beauty.” *Kant Studien*, 74 (1983), pp. 488-507.

different. Kant argues that practical reason takes an interest in the “objective reality” of its ideas (§42,300). Kant then explains the intellectual interest in the beautiful as an extension of this moral interest. This is why the intellectual interest in the beautiful is important for morality.

From the point of view of morality, for Kant, natural beauty is important because it provides indirect support for an ultimate harmony between moral teleology, what the moral law demands that we strive for, and natural ends. That is, it allows us to hope that nature is so designed that the realization of the highest good, which morality requires of us, is nature’s end also. Kant will argue in the closing sections of the *Critique of Teleological Judgment* that “man regarded as noumenon” is the only possible candidate for a final end of nature because in all the rest of nature “... there is nothing whose determining ground, discoverable in nature itself, is not always in turn conditioned” (§84,435). Since a final end of nature must by definition be an end that is unconditioned, and human beings are the only creatures who must be thought of as ends in themselves, we are able to regard our autonomy as both our own end, and at the same time, the final end of nature (§84,435).

To summarize, then, these are the main ways in which I am arguing the intellectual interest in the beautiful is important for Kant’s project of linking the realms of nature and freedom: First, the intellectual interest in the beautiful allows Kant to link aesthetic and teleological judgment in important ways without reducing the aesthetic to the teleological. By showing us the possibility of viewing nature as if it were a work of art, natural beauty reveals to us judgment’s a priori principle of the purposiveness of nature. Once teleology has established that it is possible to regard nature as a whole as a

system of ends, natural beauty can be thought of as an end of nature. Second, Kant claims that to take an interest in natural beauty is a sign of good character.; one who loves the beautiful in nature is likely to be deeply interested in the actualization of moral ideas.

This is an importantly different picture of the relationship between freedom and nature from that which emerged from Kant's discussion of the sublime. There is an antagonistic relationship between the human and the natural at the heart of the Kantian sublime. And even though the sublime allows us to place hope in the resources of our own freedom in confronting nature, the sublime does not encourage us to think of the ends of nature as in harmony with the ends of freedom. Instead, the sublime puts us in a position of rivalry with nature, even as it reveals to us our superiority over nature from the point of view of morality. In the case of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, however, freedom and nature are thought of as in harmony with one another. When we contemplate the beauty of natural forms we are struck with a feeling of "gratitude" towards nature (*General Remark on Teleology*, 159). Kant hypothesizes that this feeling of gratitude results from a curiosity regarding the source of beauty in nature. It is a feeling of wonderment brought on by the thought that beauty, which can serve no purpose other than that of serving as the object of our disinterested pleasure, exists in nature at all.

Kant on the Ideal of Beauty

I. Introduction

Perhaps the place in the third *Critique* where it first becomes apparent that Kant will grant an important place to practical reason in his account of aesthetic judgment is his discussion in §17 of the ideal of the beautiful. In that section Kant argues that taste (in the collective sense) requires an archetype if it is not to be entirely without coherence.

Because, on Kant's view, the pleasure we take in judgments of taste results from the harmonious play of the faculties of the imagination and the understanding when those faculties are not constrained by any determinate concept, taste in the collective sense, what Kant calls "universal taste," cannot be governed by rules. To judge according to rules, for Kant, is to judge with reference to a concept. The judgment that a given object "is beautiful," Kant argues, does not subsume the object under a concept. For this reason Kant calls the pleasure we take in the beautiful the "only free liking" (§5,210). So one thing Kant will argue in §17 is that in the absence of rules taste must be guided by "examples." Beyond this, Kant holds that there is an ideal of beauty that is supposed to be the example, or "model," guiding all of our judgments of and about taste.

Until recently most commentators on the third *Critique* had judged Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty to be of little significance for his overall account of aesthetic judgment. Paul Guyer, for example, writes in *Kant and the Claims of Taste* that Kant's account of the ideal of the beautiful "must be regarded as an aberration" (226). H.W. Cassirer, in his classic *Commentary on Kant's critique of Judgment*, ignores the section entirely, and Salim Kemal suggests that Kant's conclusions regarding a possible ideal of beauty are entirely negative.⁴⁵

Some recent works on the third *Critique*, on the other hand, have pointed out that Kant's thoughts on the ideal of the beautiful anticipate much of what he says in his account of aesthetic ideas about the way in which works of art may function as symbolic representations of moral ideas. Additionally, as Sarah Gibbons argues in her *Kant's Theory of the Imagination*, the appeal in Kant's account of taste to an ideal of beauty

appears to have an important role to play in the development of his views concerning the possibility of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature by way of reflective judgment.⁴⁶ Guyer, too, includes a reassessment of Kant's theory of the ideal of the beautiful in his *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*. Instead of dismissing Kant's account of the ideal of beauty, as he had earlier, Guyer now focuses on the important contribution the section on the ideal of beauty makes to the development of Kant's moral philosophy.⁴⁷

I think Gibbons and Guyer are right about the importance of Kant's account of the ideal of beauty for the development of his comparison between aesthetics and morality, and for his project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature. But Kant's argument in §17 is difficult to follow and, at times, even seems to conflict with some basic tenets of his account of taste. Here are just a few of the problems facing an interpreter of Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty. First, the very notion of an ideal of the beautiful seems problematic given Kant's basic picture of what an ideal of taste is supposed to be. Since Kant has so far stressed the autonomy of judgments of taste, it is somewhat surprising to find him arguing in §17 that all manifestations of taste are in some way guided by an archetype, or highest model, of taste (§17, 232). Second, Kant addresses a number of questions concerning the use of standards to guide judgments of taste without clearly differentiating between them. In the opening paragraphs of §17, where Kant is investigating the possibility of an ideal of beauty in the sense of an archetype of taste in

⁴⁵ Salim Kemal, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory: An Introduction*. London: Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 1992, p.61.

⁴⁶ Sarah L. Gibbons, *Kant's Theory of Imagination: Bridging gaps in Judgment and Experience*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. See especially pp. 97-104.

general, he writes that "...the highest model, the archetype of taste, is a mere idea, which each person must beget in his own consciousness, and according to which he must form his estimate of everything that is an Object of taste, or that is an example of critical taste, and even of universal taste itself" (§17,232). At other times, though, Kant writes as if the question of an ideal of beauty concerns, not the archetype of universal taste, but the use of exemplary models in the formation of individual taste. Finally, Kant concludes that only human beauty admits of an ideal at all, without making it clear whether we should then think of the ideal of beauty as the archetype of universal taste; and, if so, just how it is possible for the ideal of beauty to function as a guide for taste in general.

In what follows I attempt to sort out the various ways in which it might make sense for Kant to talk of an ideal of beauty, and to show more clearly than he does how the solution to one sort of problems about standards might lead to the solution of the others. My interpretation of Kant's account of the ideal of taste proceeds in three stages. First, I argue that, though Kant's exposition of his theory of the ideal of beauty does not make this especially clear, by his own lights what we are looking for in an ideal of taste is a representation of an ideal judgment rather than a representation of an ideal kind of beautiful object. Second, I argue that, in spite of Kant's lack of clarity on this issue, his answer to the problem about the archetype of taste, namely that the ideal of human beauty symbolizes the archetype of taste, makes sense only if we regard the ideal of beauty, not as a maximally beautiful object, but as a symbol of an ideal judgment of taste. That is, Kant holds that because we can form no direct presentation of an "ideal judgment" we

⁴⁷ See especially Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, pp. 41-4 and 173-4. For more on Guyer's views concerning the contribution Kant's third *Critique* makes to his moral philosophy see my chapter on beauty as the symbol of morality.

need to look elsewhere in order to find an indirect (symbolic) presentation of such a judgment. The ideal of human beauty, Kant suggests, is the only suitable candidate for such a symbol.

Finally, I briefly discuss significance of Kant's theory of the ideal of the beautiful for his unfolding account of the relationship between aesthetic and moral judgment. In my concluding section I argue that Kant's thoughts on the ideal of taste shows how beauty of a particular kind, human beauty, can symbolize the goal of morality, and in so doing provides us with an illustration of what Kant means when he later claims that beauty in general symbolizes morality. My goal in this chapter is to suggest what I later will argue is the case; namely, that Kant's various discussions of the purported analogy between aesthetic and moral judgment (especially §17 and §42) are designed to prepare us for his claim in §59 that beauty is the symbol of morality.

II. A Universal Standard of Taste

Kant's account of the ideal of the beautiful opens with the warning that what is at issue in the search for the archetype of taste is not "...a universal criterion of the beautiful by definite concepts..." (§17,232). That is, we cannot hope to locate a universal set of criteria for judging an object to be beautiful that is based on a concept of the beautiful. To search for such criteria would contradict Kant's account of taste, according to which judgments of taste are not based on determinate concepts.

We are nevertheless led by the "universal communicability" of the pleasure we take in judgments of taste to conceive of an "underlying ground" for the widespread

agreement among “peoples of all ages and nations” concerning what is beautiful (§17,232). The agreement Kant refers to here can only be of the most general kind. As Kant will soon make clear, he recognizes that cultural standards for what is beautiful will often be in conflict. This is part of the reason why the “empirical criterion” for the claim that there is some underlying ground for what agreement about the beautiful *does* exist cross- culturally is characterized by Kant as “weak” (§17,232). Kant’s main point here is just that we are impelled by the possibility of agreement about the beautiful implicit in the communicability of judgments of taste (and manifest in the rough consensus to be found in the opinions of “all ages and nations” regarding what is beautiful) to look for a deep seated basis for that agreement.

But what does Kant mean here by an underlying ground for agreement in matters of taste? Put simply, the looked for “ground” of agreement about beauty is just a universal standard for taste. Kant’s idea here is that we are led by the communicability of judgments of taste (our experience of them as subjectively universal), and the rough consensus we find among people of “all ages and nations” regarding what is beautiful, to suppose that some universal standard for beauty exists. That is, there must be some explanation, some “ground,” for what Kant calls universal taste.

Following Kant’s observation that we expect to find an underlying ground for taste, he argues that it is this expectation that leads us to regard “some products of taste as exemplary” (§17,232). Now it is not immediately obvious how the thought of a common basis for taste is supposed to explain the fact that we regard certain beautiful objects as exemplary, but I think Kant has something like the following in mind. Since (1) Kant’s account of what a judgment of taste is precludes any conceptually based universal

standard of taste, and (2) we are nonetheless impelled to conceive of a standard, (3) we treat certain beautiful objects as if they themselves constituted a standard for taste.

One way of thinking about what Kant has in mind here is to consider what we mean when we call a given work of art “exemplary.” One thing we seem to mean by this is that “this is the sort of art work one ought to imitate.” But what provokes us to say “ought” here if not some belief that the virtues of the work in question are universally recognizable as such? Kant’s insight is that the very fact that we think this way is evidence of our belief in, or at least our desire for, a universal standard of beauty.

Kant notes here that such exemplary products of taste cannot of themselves teach someone to judge tastefully. This is because wholesale reliance on examples when attempting to make judgments of taste would amount to mere “imitation of the taste of others” (§17,232). Since taste, for Kant, “must be an original faculty,” exemplary models are not sufficient to impart taste where it is otherwise lacking (§17,232). This echoes Kant’s remark in the first *Critique* that “...though understanding is capable of being instructed, and of being equipped with rules, judgment is a peculiar talent which can be practiced only, and cannot be taught” (A133/B172).

It is important to keep in mind that Kant has here shifted from talking about the use of examples in the formation of the taste of an individual, to a discussion of what the archetype of taste in general has to be like. At both levels it is appropriate to raise the question of how ideals enter into, or guide, judgments of taste, but there are clearly two issues here. The first is what role, if any, exemplary beautiful objects play in the

formation of a given individual's taste.⁴⁸ The second, related, issue concerns the archetype of taste. That is, a model that would somehow guide *all* judgments of taste, and even our assessment of "universal taste itself" (§17, 232).

Unfortunately, Kant does not clearly draw this distinction, and so it is often unclear which problem about standards he is addressing at the various stages of his argument in §17. To ease this confusion, I will adopt the following modification of Kant's terminology. I will refer to the "exemplary models" that guide the formation of individual taste within a given domain of taste as "ideals of beauty." The second kind of ideal, the one that is supposed to guide all of our judgments of taste, I will term the ideal, or archetype, of taste.

I am not proposing that this is the way Kant uses these terms in the text of the third *Critique*. Kant seems to use the terms "ideal of taste" and "ideal of beauty" interchangeably, and at the one place where he proposes a distinction between them he writes that the archetype of taste "...may more appropriately be called the ideal of the beautiful" (§17,232). The reason that Kant thinks "ideal of beauty" is better than "ideal of taste" is that the former highlights the fact that the ideal in question is an ideal of the imagination, and, like beauty itself, is not based on a determinate concept. My revision of Kant's terminology is not meant to conflict with what Kant argues here. I am calling the singular ideal of beauty the "ideal of taste" to (1) distinguish it from "ideals of beauty" like the "ideal of beauty with respect to horses" and (2) to distinguish the problem about

⁴⁸ This issue is taken up again in Kant's discussion of genius, where he claims that one genius learns from another by "following," but not "imitating," exemplary works of art. See especially §49, 318-19. Also interesting here is that Kant argues that it is actually the "talent" of the genius, and not so much the work in which that talent manifests itself, that is exemplary. This mirrors my suggestion that what guides taste in

exemplary models for the formation of an individual's taste from the problem of an ideal for taste in general. I choose to call the latter the archetype of taste to emphasize that, as I shall argue below, it is best thought of as a symbol of an ideal kind of judgment, rather than as the representation of a maximally beautiful object. Thus my terminology, where it conflicts with Kant's, does so because I am either emphasizing points that he doesn't clearly recognize (the point about the ideal of taste being an ideal kind of judgment), or attempting to clarify distinctions that Kant does make, but that he blurs by using the term "ideal of beauty" in several different senses without clearly saying how it is meant in each case.

To return to Kant's exposition of the ideal of taste, after observing that the archetype of taste must be produced in the consciousness of each subject who attempts to make a judgment of taste, Kant explains in what sense this ultimate standard of taste can rightly be called an "ideal" of taste (Kant says "ideal of beauty" as noted above). Kant's explanation makes use of his first *Critique* account of ideals. According to that account, an ideal is the representation of an individually existing thing that fully measures up to the idea of what that thing ought to be (§17,233). To use Kant's first *Critique* example, the figure of a wise man can serve as the "ideal of wisdom" in so far as such a figure is regarded as a presentation of everything that is included in the idea of wisdom (A569/B579). Kant goes on to remark that the ideal of wisdom exists "in thought only" (A569/B579). That is, though we can perfectly well think of the "wise man" as "perfectly wise," no actually existing man or woman, no matter how wise he or she turns out to be, can perfectly measure up to the idea of wisdom. The ideal of wisdom, and other such

general, on Kant's account, is a symbol of a perfect judgment of taste rather than a maximally beautiful

ideals, are important, for Kant, because they supply reason with standards that allow it to “...estimate and to measure the degree and the defects of the incomplete” (A570/B598). In the case of the ideal of wisdom, we measure our actions against the standard of the “wise man” in order to improve ourselves morally (A570/B598).

Kant calls ideals of the above sort “rational ideals.” But there is another kind of ideal briefly discussed by Kant in the third *Critique* that is relevant to his discussion of the ideal of taste. These are the “ideals of sensibility,” which, according to Kant’s first *Critique* account of them, are ideals produced by the imagination. Strictly speaking, for Kant, this makes ideals of sensibility the mere analogues of true ideals (rational ones). Thus Kant writes of ideals of sensibility, in contrast to ideals of reason, that,

The products of the imagination are of an entirely different nature; no one can explain or give an intelligible concept of them; each is a kind of *monogram*, a mere set of particular qualities, determined by no assignable rule, and forming rather a blurred sketch drawn from diverse experiences than a determinate image- a representation such as painters and physiognomists profess to carry in their heads, and which they treat as being an incommunicable shadowy image of their critical judgments. Such representations may be entitled, though improperly, ideals of sensibility, inasmuch as they are viewed as being models (not indeed realizable) of possible empirical intuitions, and yet furnish no rules that allow of being explained and examined (A571/B599).

There are two aspects of Kant’s first *Critique* description of ideals of sensibility that are especially relevant to his account of the ideal of taste in the *Critique of Judgment*. The first is that Kant’s account of “ideals of sensibility” helps to explain what he means when he claims that the ideal of taste should really be thought of as the “ideal of beauty” because such an ideal is not based on a determinate concept (*CJ*, §17, 232). What Kant is doing here is pointing out that the ideal of taste is not a “rational idea,” like that of the

object.

wise man, but is more like what he terms an “ideal of sensibility” in the first *Critique*. More specifically, the ideal of beauty, like the first *Critique*’s ideals of sensibility, is an ideal of the imagination.

Importantly, though, and this is the second relevant aspect of Kant’s first *Critique* description of ideals of sensibility for the present discussion, Kant’s thinking regarding the “shadowy images” that “painters and physiognomists” claim to have in their heads had changed in some important ways by the time of the third *Critique*. Kant now calls such images “aesthetic ideas,” and claims, in contrast to what he says in the first *Critique*, that they are communicable, or at least “expressible” in works of art. As I hope to show below, the connection Kant draws between “painters and physiognomists” is an important one. Briefly put; both painters, as fine artists, and anyone who attempts to make a judgment concerning the interior of a person based on outward appearance (physiognomists), make use of “aesthetic ideas” in their judgments. Since Kant’s account of the ideal of taste, as we shall see, involves a physiognomical component, and physiognomy, for Kant, proceeds by way of aesthetic ideas, his fuller account of the latter will be important for understanding Kant’s theory of the ideal of taste.⁴⁹

Later I will return to the point about the relevance of Kant’s account of aesthetic ideas for his account of the ideal of taste. For now I just want to stress that at the outset of his discussion of the ideal of taste in §17 Kant is thinking of the archetype of taste as an “ideal of the imagination” rather than as an ideal of reason. This explains why Kant

⁴⁹ My discussion in this chapter focuses on the use of aesthetic ideas in making physiognomical judgments; what Kant calls “aesthetic normal ideas.” I consider more carefully Kant’s account of the role of aesthetic ideas in the creation and appreciation of works of fine art in my chapter on beauty as the symbol of morality. The main point I wish to make here is that there is a connection between Kant’s account of the ideal of taste and his theory of aesthetic ideas. It is, in part, on the basis of this connection, and on the fact

claims that, strictly speaking, we do not have an ideal of taste “in our possession” (§17,232). Instead, Kant asserts that we “strive to beget it within us” (§17,232). If the ideal of taste were a rational idea, like the ideal of wisdom or of perfection, it would be based upon some determinate concept of reason. But the ideal of taste cannot be a rational ideal because judgments of taste, which the ideal of taste is meant to be an ideal of, are themselves, for Kant, made independently of determinate concepts. Kant’s main point in claiming that the ideal of taste is better thought of as an “ideal of beauty” is that, since reason can supply no determinate concept of beauty, we can have no *rational* ideal of taste. Any archetype we do identify governing taste in general, then, will be an ideal of the imagination.

This is not to say that reason is not involved at all in the formation of the ideal of taste. Kant believes we attempt to form an ideal of taste, even though such an ideal is one of imagination and not reason, because we are led by “...reason’s indeterminate idea of a maximum” (§17,232). What Kant’s explanation amounts to is that reason, and more specifically reason’s idea of a maximum, leads us to look for an unconditioned ground for taste claims. Thus what explains our need for an ideal of taste is what accounts for the formation of ideals in general, namely, reason’s idea of a maximum.⁵⁰

Since there is no determinate concept of beauty, for Kant, the ideal of beauty must be an ideal of imagination rather than one of reason. The remainder of §17 is devoted to exploring the questions of where the notion of such a seemingly paradoxical ideal comes

that Kant regards aesthetic ideas, or what expresses them, as symbols, that I will later argue that the ideal of beauty should be regarded as a “symbolic presentation.”

⁵⁰ The indeterminate idea of a maximum explains ideals in general insofar as it explains *ideas* in general, of which ideals are supposed to be representations. See especially A572/B600-A574/B602 in the first *Critique* for the role of the idea of a maximum in the formation of the *ens realissimum*, which Kant calls *the*

from, whether it is a priori or a posteriori, and “what species of the beautiful admits of an ideal” (§17,232). Kant’s answer to the last question is that only human beauty yields an ideal. I now turn to an examination of this claim.

III. The Ideal of Human Beauty

Kant’s explanation of why only human beauty can supply us with an ideal of beauty begins with a discussion of whether the beauty that gives rise to an ideal is free or dependent beauty. Thus Kant has, at least for the moment, shifted his discussion from the topic of a single archetype of taste to that of how ideals for particular kinds of objects are produced. Kant’s first claim here is that “...the beauty for which an ideal has to be sought cannot be a beauty that is *free and at large*, but must be one *fixed* by a concept of objective finality (§17,233). For Kant, there is no question of coming up with an archetype for free beauties because in order to estimate beauty according to an ideal we have to rest our estimation of the beautiful on “some idea of reason according to universal concepts” (§17,233). Thus Kant observes that “An ideal of beautiful flowers, of a beautiful suite of furniture, or of a beautiful view, is unthinkable” (§17,233).⁵¹

ideal of reason. See also 5:108-5:113 in the *Critique of Practical Reason* for a more concise general discussion of the applicability of the idea of a maximum in the formation of ideas in general.

⁵¹ One could question Kant’s inclusion here of a “beautiful suite of furniture” among what are supposed to be “free” beauties. Do we not estimate the beauty of a suite of furniture according to some determinate concept of how suites of furniture ought to appear? It is really no more peculiar, however, to claim that suites of furniture are aesthetically appreciated without regard to a concept than it is to claim the same regarding wallpaper designs, a notorious Kantian example of a “free beauty.” The fact that we find it easy to quibble over what is or is not reasonably considered a “free beauty” is, I think, evidence of the difficulty of coming up with unambiguous examples of judgments of taste that answer to Kant’s description of a “pure judgment of taste.”

In the case of dependent beauties, too, Kant claims that an ideal of beauty “may be impossible” (§17,233). This is in spite of the fact that judgments that have as their object dependent beauties, unlike those whose objects are free beauties, do rely on concepts. Kant’s reasoning here is that our concept of how a given thing ought to appear, though it gives us some guidance in this regard, will still not be sufficient for us to form a representation of an ideally beautiful object capable of serving as the archetype of beauty for that kind of thing. We do have some concept of what a “beautiful horse” ought to look like, for example, but that concept is not determinate enough for us to decide what the “ideally beautiful horse” looks like. That question will always be a matter of contention among horse lovers. For this reason Kant claims that there cannot be an ideal of a beautiful tree or garden, any more than there can be an ideal of a beautiful flower, on the grounds that the concepts that are brought together with judgments of taste about dependent beauties are so indeterminate that, from the point of view of coming up with an ideal of beauty, such beauties might as well be “vague” (free) (§17,233).

Kant goes on to claim that the unique case in which a dependent beauty rests on a concept determinate enough to produce an ideal is that of human beauty. Kant’s argument for this claim is based on his view that the rational concept “man” is completely determinate; it prescribes in full what humanity as a species ought to become. This is possible in the case of humanity because “*man*...is able himself to determine his ends by reason, or, where he has to derive them from external perception, can still compare them with essential and universal ends, and then further pronounce aesthetically upon their accord with such ends...” (§17,233).

Kant makes two important points here. First, because human beings are uniquely capable of rationally determining their own ultimate ends, the idea of humanity, by which Kant means first and foremost the rational (moral) idea of what humanity ought to make of itself, is determinate in a way that no other concept of an object is due to the fact that we are the only kinds of beings who freely set our own ends. For this reason, Kant holds that the idea of a “perfect human being” is fixed; whereas there is no way to finally settle the question of what the “perfect horse” is like. The second important point Kant makes here is that human beings have the capacity to regard all of our ends, not just those prescribed by practical reason, in light of moral ideas. Further, we are able to make aesthetic judgments based on the harmony or disharmony of even those ends “derived from external perception” with our “essential” (moral) ends (§17,233). That is, we are capable of allowing our idea of human beauty to be guided by our idea of the final end of morality. It is this capacity to combine aesthetic judgment with the idea of our ultimate moral purpose that Kant thinks justifies his claim that only human beauty admits of an ideal of beauty.

After Kant explains why, for him, human beauty is the only kind of beauty capable of generating an ideal of the beautiful, he observes that such an ideal would actually be composed of two parts. These are an “aesthetic normal idea,” which according to Kant is an aesthetic estimate of the average human appearance, and a rational idea of human beauty. This division reflects Kant’s view that what makes an ideal of human beauty possible is the human capacity to make aesthetic judgments guided by ideas of reason. I now examine Kant’s account of the two components of the ideal of human beauty beginning, as he does, with the aesthetic normal idea.

As we saw earlier, Kant's first *Critique* account of ideals includes a brief, and for the most part dismissive, discussion of "ideals of sensibility" (A571/B599). These are the "ideals" that "artists and physiognomists" purportedly refer to as models for their creations and judgments. According to the first *Critique* account of them, ideals of sensibility are like "blurred sketches" formed by the imagination out of a wide variety of experiences (A571/B599). Because such ideals, unlike ideals of reason, are not formed according to determinate concepts, Kant describes them as "mere sets of qualities" (A571/B599). The lack of a determinate rule or concept governing the formation of ideals of sensibility also explains why Kant claims, at least in his first *Critique* treatment of them, that ideals of sensibility are not ideals at all in the strict sense (A571/B599).⁵²

Kant's description of "aesthetic normal ideas" in the third *Critique* bears some strong similarities to his account of ideals of sensibility in the first. Kant claims that we arrive at the aesthetic normal idea through observation of "...man as a member of a particular animal species" (§17,233). Roughly, it is the idea we form "by the eye" of the average human appearance. In the case of the "stature" of a beautiful human being, for example, Kant supposes that the imagination runs through a great number of perceptions of human size and arrives at a perception of the average size of a human being. This perception is then incorporated into the aesthetic normal idea of human beauty; it gives us the "stature of a beautiful man" (§17,234).

⁵² Kant's thinking regarding the nature and function of ideals of sensibility undergoes some important changes by the time of the third *Critique*. Whereas the first *Critique* account mentions only "ideals" of sensibility, in the third Kant includes discussions of "ideals of imagination," aesthetic ideas," and "aesthetic normal ideas." All of these bear some similarity to the "ideals of sensibility" of the first *Critique*. Though I am now concerned mainly to explicate the role of "aesthetic normal ideas" in the formation of the ideal of human beauty it is important not to suppress the connection between these and, especially, "aesthetic ideas." For a consideration of the role aesthetic ideas play in the creation of works of fine art, for Kant, see my chapter on beauty as the symbol of morality.

Importantly, the aesthetic normal idea is not an empirical concept of human beauty. Like the ideals of sensibility of the first *Critique*, aesthetic normal ideas are not formed according to any determinate rule (§17,234). Rather, rules governing judgments about human beauty are “made possible” in the first place by the aesthetic normal idea (§17,234). The aesthetic normal idea, by serving as a “negative condition” for human beauty, allows us to formulate rules, however inexact these may turn out to be, for making judgments about human beauty. When Kant claims that such a standard does not amount to an “empirical concept” of human beauty, he means that it does not supply us with necessary and sufficient conditions for judging a given presentation of the human form to be beautiful. Instead, the aesthetic normal idea is an indistinct image of what the human form should look like that serves as a standard for judgments about the “correctness” of particular presentations of that form (§17,234). To recall Kant’s phrase from the first *Critique*, the aesthetic normal idea is a “shadowy image” of human beauty that underlies our judgments concerning the “academic correctness” of presentations of the human form (§17,235). It is precisely the kind of ideal of the imagination a painter purports to make reference to when she attempts to paint a beautiful human form.

The second component of the ideal of human beauty is the rational idea of human beauty. This idea, for Kant, “...deals with the ends of humanity so far as capable of sensuous representation, and converts them into a principle for estimating his outward form, through which these ends are revealed in their phenomenal effect” (§17,233). Put more simply, the rational idea of human beauty allows us to view human beauty as symbolic of moral ideas.

Before further exploring Kant's notion that the ideal of human beauty involves seeing beauty as symbolic of moral ideas, we need to briefly consider the account of symbolism he offers in his discussion of beauty as the symbol of morality.⁵³ Kant does not mean by "symbol" a mark or "sign" that simply "designates a concept" (§59,352). Instead, Kant holds that the 'symbolic' is a "mode of intuitive representation" that allows us to form presentations of concepts "...which only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate" (§59,351). That is, the symbolic mode of presentation allows us to form "indirect" intuitive presentations of rational ideas.

Kant's idea is roughly the following. There are two ways in which a priori concepts can be supplied with intuitive representations. In the first way, the schematic mode of intuitive representation, an intuition corresponding to a pure concept of the understanding is "given a priori" by the imagination (§59,351). This is the mode of presentation, characteristic of determinative judgment, through which the pure concepts of the understanding are able to be "demonstrated."⁵⁴ Such presentations are characterized by Kant as "direct presentations" of a concept. In the first *Critique*, Kant calls the representation that mediates between a pure concept of the understanding and appearances its "transcendental schema" (B177/A138). Kant writes of the schema of a concept that it is a "...representation of a universal procedure of imagination in providing an image for a concept..." (B179/A140). So, roughly, what "schematic presentation" is, for Kant, is the process by which, in determinative judgments, the imagination provides

⁵³ I discuss Kant's theory of symbolic presentation more fully in my chapter on beauty as the symbol of morality.

⁵⁴ For Kant, a "demonstration" of a concept is an "apodeictic proof." Kant holds that such proofs are only possible in the realm of mathematics because only there do we have concepts that can be "constructed" from a priori intuitions.

us with a representation of a rule for subsuming particular intuitions under a concept.⁵⁵ This is supposed to explain how pure concepts of the understanding, which are “quite heterogeneous from empirical intuitions,” can be applied to appearances (B177/A138).

The second way in which a priori concepts are supplied with intuitions, for Kant, is through the symbolic mode of presentation. Symbolic presentations are “indirect” presentations of rational ideas (§59,352). In such presentations, a concept is first applied to a given object of empirical intuition, and then the rule for reflecting upon that intuition is applied to another object (§59,352). The first object then becomes the “symbol” of the second. In this way, for example, a “healthy body” can symbolize a “constitutional monarchy” (§59,352). Importantly, what Kant calls “symbolic hypotyposis” enables us to form “indirect” presentations of rational ideas, which otherwise cannot be supplied with intuitions. It is in this sense that Kant can claim in §17 that human beauty symbolizes moral ideas. As I hope to show, Kant’s account of symbolism can also help to explain how the ideal of human beauty can serve as the archetype of taste. I now return to Kant’s exposition of the ideal of human beauty.

Kant holds that the “greatest part” of the ideal of human beauty is drawn, not from the aesthetic normal idea of human beauty, but from the idea that the judging subject has of the final purpose of humanity (§17,233). The final purpose of humanity is a topic Kant takes up in much more detail in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, and I have more to say about this topic later in this chapter, and in my concluding chapter on beauty as the symbol of morality. For now it will suffice to think of the “final purpose of humanity” as

⁵⁵ A fuller treatment of Kant’s doctrine of the schematism is well outside the scope of this chapter. At this stage, my goal is simply to provide some context for Kant’s claim in §17 that human beauty symbolizes

the actualization of the end of morality in nature. Our final purpose as rational beings, for Kant, is the fulfillment of the ends of morality.

But how does the idea of a final purpose contribute to the formation of the ideal of human beauty ? Kant's idea seems to be roughly the following. In representing to herself the ideal of human beauty the judging subject brings into play; first, the merely negative criteria by which we judge a presentation of the human form to be "correct," and, second, the rational idea that allows us to "estimate the outward form" of a person as if that form expressed the fundamental (moral) purpose of humanity. Consequently, we are led to view human beauty as an expression of the moral, and the ideal of human beauty as a symbol of the moral destiny of humanity.

Kant next offers an account of how the two components of the ideal of human beauty work together to produce an archetype of human beauty that is "capable of being fully presented *in concreto* in a model image" (§17,233). In this account Kant attempts to show how the mind works to combine the two components of the ideal of human beauty into a single archetype of human beauty. Kant warns, however, that his account of this process is bound to be incomplete. Some details of it, Kant remarks, will have to remain "nature's secret" (§17,233). For this reason, Kant regards his account of how the ideal of human beauty is formed as a psychological, as opposed to a philosophical, one.

As we have seen, Kant holds that the first component of the ideal of human beauty, the aesthetic normal idea, is produced in the mind by the observation over time of a great many particular presentations of the human form. This results in our being able to form an estimation of presentations of the human form in terms of how a given

moral ideas. For more on the contrast between schematic and symbolic presentation see my chapter on

presentation of that form compares to our perception of the norm. Since our experience of what the average human form is like is bound to differ according to culture, Kant supposes that different groups will naturally have different normal ideas of human beauty. One consequence of this is that the aesthetic normal idea itself cannot serve as an ideal of human beauty. If the aesthetic normal idea of human beauty were all that we had, there could be no true archetype of human beauty. We would then have to rest content with the sort of indeterminate ideal of beauty that we have for other objects like horses or gardens. Because our ideals in such cases are not based on a fully determinate concept of what an object “ought to be,” these ideals are always open to dispute and revision. What passes for a “perfectly beautiful garden” today may be found to be in poor taste tomorrow.

The case is different, for Kant, with the ideal of human beauty because we have in our possession an idea of reason that tells us, not what we are as a species, but what we ought to become. Additionally, since the source of this idea is reason’s unconditional demand that we act morally, the idea of perfect human beauty is not open to dispute and revision. It is in this way that our ideal of human beauty is importantly different from every other standard of beauty we employ.

Kant discusses two ways in which moral ideas are involved in our judgments regarding human beauty. The first concerns judgments about individual presentations of the human form. Here Kant offers an explanation of how “physiognomical” judgments, or judgments that attempt to say something about the “character” reflected in a given presentation of the human form, are made. The second way in which moral ideas enter into our conception of human beauty has to do with the thought of the ideal of human

beauty as the symbol of morality.

beauty itself. In this case, the role of moral ideas is that they allow us to regard the beauty of the human form as symbolic of the highest goals of reason.

Let us look more carefully at Kant's view of physiognomy. Although Kant's treatment of this theme in the third *Critique* is fairly sketchy, it is clear from what he writes in the *Anthropology* that Kant endorses a kind of physiognomy according to which there is some justification for the claim that one can see the effects of moral ideas in a person's physical appearance. Kant writes that,

...it cannot be disputed that there is characterization by physiognomy. Yet it can never become a science, because the peculiarity of a human form, which indicates certain inclinations or faculties of the subject under consideration, cannot be understood by terminological description. It can only be done through images and representation (by intuition) or through imitation, whereby the human form in general is judged according to its varieties, every one of which is supposed to point to a special inner quality of the person (*Anthropology* §89, 296).

This helps to explain what Kant has in mind when he claims in the third *Critique* that "the visible expression of moral ideas that govern men inwardly can...only be drawn from experience" (§17,235).

Importantly, though, Kant does not endorse a scientific physiognomy of the sort proposed by Lavater.⁵⁶ Kant does believe that we can, and even "must," make judgments about character based on appearance. But this kind of judging cannot be made the basis of a science because it proceeds wholly by "images and representations" (*Anthropology* §89,296). One way of thinking about this that would bring into play Kant's third *Critique* account of aesthetic appreciation would be to say that, in so far as the human form is

⁵⁶ Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), author of *Physiognomische Fragmente*.

capable of *symbolically* representing moral ideas, we tend to view various aspects of that form as if they expressed something about a person's moral character. This in no way justifies, however, actual inferences concerning the character of an individual based on his appearance. Indeed, Kant goes out of his way in the *Anthropology* to warn against such inferences.⁵⁷

The second way in which moral ideas contribute to the formation of the ideal of human beauty, for Kant, is that they allow us to view human beauty as expressive, not just of individual moral character, but also of the goal of morality itself. Thus Kant writes in the conclusion of §17 that the ideal of human beauty is a presentation of "...all that our reason connects with the morally good in the idea of the highest finality...(§17, 235). Following Kant's account of moral teleology, especially as set out in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, this suggests that the ideal of human beauty is in some way symbolic of the highest good.⁵⁸

The highest good, for Kant, can be thought of as the "unconditioned" sought by reason in its practical employment (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:108). Just as theoretical reason demands that we find an unconditioned for every conditioned in the empirical realm, practical reason "...likewise seeks the unconditioned for the practically conditioned (which rests on inclinations and natural needs), not indeed as the determining ground of the will, but even when this is given (in the moral law), it seeks the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, under the name of the *highest good*" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:108). In the second *Critique* the highest good is

⁵⁷ Kant remarks in *Anthropology* §89 that it is a sign of wickedness to insult a person because of his physical appearance (§89,299).

⁵⁸ See especially *Critique of Practical Reason* 5: 108-5: 113.

the “whole human good,” which, for Kant, must involve: 1. Virtue, or the complete determination of the will of a finite rational being by the moral law.⁵⁹ 2. Happiness in proportion to one’s virtue (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:108). In the third *Critique*’s treatment of moral teleology, and in Kant’s less technical essays on the history of human reason, Kant amplifies his thesis of the highest good by showing how the goal of morality and the final end of nature are linked. Though a more thorough treatment of these issues is outside the scope of this chapter, it is important to recognize that, for Kant, the ideal of human beauty expresses the collective goals of humanity, and not just individual moral character.

III. The Ideal of Taste as an Ideal Judgment

Kant’s explanation of the ideal of human beauty leaves it unclear just how the ideal of human beauty can serve as the archetype of taste.⁶⁰ That is, how does the ideal of human beauty discussed above become a “highest model” of taste? Why doesn’t the ideal of human beauty guide only judgments of taste about human beauty? I believe the key to answering this question is the recognition that the ideal of taste, for Kant, is a symbol of an ideal judgment, rather than an ideally beautiful object.

⁵⁹ “Virtue,” for Kant, describes the disposition of a finite rational being who has made the moral law “...the constant though unattainable goal” of her actions (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:85).

⁶⁰ It is not even entirely clear that Kant identifies the ideal of human beauty as the ideal of taste. It is possible, I think, to read §17 as claiming that strictly speaking there is no ideal of taste, but that we do have an ideal of beauty in the case of human beauty (and only in the case of human beauty). In this way one could explain Kant’s early claim that we do not have an ideal of beauty “in our possession,” but seek to produce one from “within us,” and at the same time avoid the task of explaining how the ideal of beauty serves as the archetype of taste (§17,232). Such a reading, while defensible, does not seem to me to do justice to the richness of Kant’s thinking about a possible ideal of beauty. It is preferable, I think, to attempt to see how Kant might reasonably construe the ideal of human beauty as the ideal of beauty.

One way of thinking about an ideal of beauty would be to conceive of it as a given presentation that everyone would find maximally beautiful. The ideal would then be, as Guyer puts it, a “single beautiful object that maximally pleases everybody.”⁶¹ This description of what an ideal of beauty consists of is accurate, I think, if what one has in mind is an ideal of beauty for a particular kind of object. The ideal of human beauty would be of this kind. Kant writes of the ideal of beauty that “...it is, with all its proportions, capable of being presented *in concreto* in a model image” (§17,233). So an ideal of beauty for some particular kind of object is a singular presentation that everyone agrees is maximally beautiful.

In the case of the archetype of taste, however, Kant remarks that “the highest model...is a mere idea, which each person must beget in his own consciousness...” (§17,232). Since judgments of taste have their “determining ground in the feeling of the subject,” no given model can serve as an ideal of taste for all judging subjects. The problem is not that judgments of taste are aesthetic, and so not based on a concept of the object. The same would be true of judgments about human beauty, and Kant has already argued that there can be a maximally beautiful presentation of an object in that case. Besides, *all* judgments of taste that also involve a concept of the perfection of the object are “impure” in so far as they do rely on concepts. The problem in the case of the ideal of taste is that it is supposed to serve as a model for all judgments of taste, not just judgments of taste about a particular kind of thing that incorporate a concept of the perfection of that thing (such as judgments of taste about human beauty). But, for Kant, no given presentation can serve as the model for taste in general because such a model

⁶¹ Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, p.43.

would amount to a “universal criterion of the beautiful by definite concepts” (§17,232). What we require in this case, as I hope to show, is a symbol of an ideal judgment of taste.

There is a sense, then, in which it is right to say that there is no archetype of taste. There is no singular object that everyone can be expected to find maximally beautiful. But Kant holds that we nevertheless seek for an ideal of taste. Presumably this is because the very notion of “universal taste” seems to require an archetype in order to give shape to what would otherwise be a diverse body of aesthetic judgments organized by merely empirical principles of taste. Taste, for Kant, cannot be governed by determinate rules. Whatever unity the body of judgments that make up taste (in the collective sense) has is provided it by models; but since these models are specific to particular domains of beauty (a model symphony is of no direct help in estimating the beauty of a poem), and we are impelled by reason to conceive of an ultimate basis for taste, we look for a highest standard of taste (a “model of models”) to further unify it.

But what is this highest standard supposed to be like? It is in answering this question that I think the distinction between “ideals of beauty” and the “ideal of taste” becomes especially important. If beauty were, contrary to what Kant actually argues about it, actually a quality of objects, then an ideal of beauty might be something like the following. It would, following Kant’s account of ideals in general in the first *Critique*, be some presentation that fully exemplified everything that is contained in our concept of beauty. Consider one of Kant’s examples of an ideal of reason. Kant writes of the idea of humanity that it “contains...all the essential qualities which belong to human nature and constitute our concept of it” (A568/B596). The ideal in this case, for Kant, is the figure of the “Stoic wise man” who fully exemplifies the idea of humanity.

Notice that if we substituted “beauty” for “human nature” in the above passage we would end up with what, given Kant’s analysis of taste so far in the third *Critique*, would be a strange result. We would be in the position of saying that the ideal of the beautiful was a singularly beautiful object which fully exemplified the “essential qualities” contained in our concept of beauty.

As we have seen, though, Kant holds that what is essential about beauty concerns the judging *subject*, not the object. That is, there are no essential qualities of a beautiful object on Kant’s account. It would be odd, then, if Kant were to claim that some “maximally beautiful object” could serve as the ideal of taste. It would be odd precisely because beauty, for Kant, does not depend on a concept of the object. Or, to put the point in a slightly different way, our concept of beauty does not give us a set of qualities that always count as beauty-making characteristics for objects. Instead, an object is rightly called “beautiful” when the subject’s cognitive faculties are engaged in a disinterested purposive free play in the act of apprehending the form of the object.

Given that what is essential about beauty concerns the subject rather than the object, then, to what is reason’s “indeterminate idea of a maximum” applied in order to arrive at an ideal of taste? One way of avoiding the difficulties sketched above, I think, is to treat the ideal of human beauty as a symbol of a perfect kind of judgment rather than a maximally beautiful object. A perfect judgment of taste, Kant’s story could go, is one which is in complete agreement with what every other judging subject would say under ideal conditions concerning the object in question. That is, the idea which the ideal of taste instantiates in the idea of “universal taste” understood as perfect agreement in matters of taste. This reading is given some support by Kant’s opening paragraph in §17,

where he claims that it is the communicability of judgments of taste that leads us to search for an archetype of taste in the first place.

...in the universal communicability of the sensation (of delight or aversion)- a communicability, too, that exists apart from any concept- in the accord, so far as possible, of all ages and nations as to the feeling in the representation of certain objects, we have the empirical criterion, weak indeed and scarce sufficient to raise a presumption, of the derivation of a taste, thus confirmed by examples, from grounds deep-seated and shared alike by all men, underlying their agreement in estimating the forms under which objects are given to them (§17,232).

The above passage gives us some clue as to how Kant is thinking about the ideal of taste here. Kant holds that what leads us to expect an ideal of taste is the communicability of judgments of taste. This is strongly reminiscent of Kant's claim in the second Moment that in making a judgment of taste the judging subject appeals to the "idea" of a universal voice (§8,216). In §8 Kant attempts to explain what he means by the "subjective universality" of a judgment of taste by developing the notion of an idea of universality which the judging subject has in view when making a judgment of taste. Kant's remarks there are worth looking at more closely.

There can...be no rule according to which any one is to be compelled to recognize anything as beautiful.... . We want to get a look at the Object with our own eyes, just as if our delight depended on sensation. And yet, if upon so doing, we call the object beautiful, we believe ourselves to be speaking with a universal voice, and lay claim to the concurrence of every one, whereas no private sensation would be decisive except for the observer alone and *his* liking (§8,216).

Kant is not concerned here to justify the universality claimed for the judgment of taste; that task is saved for the deduction (§§30-39). Rather, Kant's aim is to highlight the

tension in the claim of taste between the requirement that such a claim must be based on a subjective impression and the requirement that it “speak with a universal voice.” At this stage of his exposition Kant is content to point out that this tension exists, and to observe that, because the judgment of taste does not rest on a determinate concept of the object, the universality of such judgments is “only an idea.” Later in the third *Critique* this theme is taken up again in various ways; most notably in the sections on the deduction, and in the antinomy of taste. It also serves, as I hope to make clear, as the relevant background for the claims made about an ideal of taste in §17.

What I am arguing, then, is that when Kant remarks in §17 that the communicability of judgments of taste leads us to look for an ideal of taste, he is echoing his observation in §8 that the “universal voice” with which a judgment of taste attempts to speak is only an idea. Following my earlier suggestion, the ideal of taste will not be a maximally beautiful object. Instead, it will be a symbol of perfect agreement in matters of taste. Kant’s account of ideals in general has it that “ideals” consist of the presentation of an individual object as completely adequate to an “idea.” In this case, then, the idea that the ideal instantiates will be the idea of the universal voice.

Another way of looking at this is to focus on the question of how reason’s indeterminate idea of a maximum is applied in the case of the ideal of the beautiful. When Kant says that the ideal of the beautiful “rests on reason’s idea of a maximum,” he is saying what is true of all ideals. But Kant does not say just what it is that is being “maximized” in the case of the ideal of taste. According to my interpretation, it is the judgment of taste itself that must serve as the basis for the ideal of taste. That is, the

archetype of taste is an idealized image of universal taste. What Kant means is that the ideal of taste is a representation of a perfect judgment of taste.

IV. The Ideal of Human Beauty as the Ideal of Taste

It is still not entirely clear how the ideal of human beauty is supposed to serve as the archetype of taste, but recognizing that there is a difference between ideals of beauty and the ideal of taste helps here. Ideals of beauty are ideals of the imagination that serve to guide judgments of taste about particular kinds of objects. Roughly, they are, or represent perfect beauty for a particular kind of thing. One such ideal is the ideal of human beauty. The ideal of human beauty is an ideal of the beauty of a particular kind of thing that is also apparently supposed to serve as the ideal of taste. That is, it is supposed to in some way guide all of our judgments of and about taste (§17,232).

Before tackling the question of how the ideal of beauty can be the looked for archetype of taste, let us review the essential components of Kant's account of the former as an ideal of beauty. As an ideal of beauty, the ideal of human beauty involves an aesthetic normal idea of correctness in the presentation of the human form and the moral idea of the final end of humanity. The presentation of this ideal, argues Kant, unites beauty and the highest good (our ultimate moral goal) in a singular presentation.

Sarah Gibbons has pointed out, rightly I think, that it is this last feature of the ideal of human beauty, the fact that it symbolizes the union of beauty with the highest good, that is the key to solving the problem about how the ideal of human beauty answers our need for an archetype of taste. Gibbons' argument is worth looking at in detail. She

explains, first, that Kant thinks of the ideal of human beauty as expressive of both “the unseen virtues of the moral individual,” and the ‘being in the world’ of an intrinsically purposive being” (Gibbons, 105) Gibbons next argues that because the ideal expresses the “purposiveness” that is the special mode of being of humanity, it must also “intimate” the “purposiveness of the world as a whole” from the point of view of humanity (Gibbons,105). Finally, Gibbons explains that the ideal of human beauty, viewed in the way just sketched, can serve to guide all judgments of taste as the archetype of taste in so far as the former enlivens our judgments of taste by making us attentive to the way the world seems to be “suited to human cognition” when features of it are judged aesthetically. That is, the ideal of human beauty, while it does not actually “guide” all judgments of taste, nevertheless enlivens the imagination in such a way as to make it particularly sensitive to the unlooked for harmony between nature’s beautiful forms and our own cognitive capacities. This amounts to saying that the ideal of human beauty enlivens all of our judgments of taste by making us aware of what is expressed in Kant’s formulation of the principle of the purposiveness of nature; that in judgments about free natural beauty nature is viewed as if its products were purposive for our cognitive faculties.

Gibbons’ interpretation of how the ideal of human beauty functions as the archetype of taste is promising, but it needs some elaboration. Especially confusing, perhaps, is Gibbon’s reliance on the notion that the ideal of human beauty expresses the “being in the world of an intrinsically purposive being.” What Gibbons is on to here, I think, is that somehow the fact that the ideal of human beauty is supposed to be

emblematic of our rational nature can help us to solve the problem about how the ideal of beauty is also the archetype of taste.

For Kant, to say that human beings are “intrinsically purposive” and to say that they are “rational creatures” amounts to the same thing. Thus in the *Anthropology* Kant writes of the character of the human species: “...all it is safe for us to say is that he [man] has a character which he himself creates, because he is capable of perfecting himself according to principles which he himself adopts. Consequently, man as an animal endowed with capability of reason... can make himself a rational animal... (*Anthropology*, §89,321). So Gibbons is right to point out that the ideal of human beauty expresses the human species’ character as purposive beings, because in forming the ideal we employ the rational idea of our final moral purpose. But it is better, I think, to say that what the ideal of human beauty symbolizes, for Kant, is our moral destiny as rational beings. To put this in the framework of Kant’s *Anthropology* remark, the ideal of human beauty expresses our capacity to use our reason (our purposive mode of being in the world) to become “rational animals” in the fullest sense. The ideal of human beauty expresses our capacity to become moral as a species.

Gibbons concludes that because the ideal of beauty expresses our purposive nature, it also serves to enliven our perception of nature in general in such a way that we tend to notice the purposiveness for our cognitive faculties displayed in certain natural forms. This is the sense in which Gibbons thinks the ideal of human beauty can guide all (even pure) judgments of taste. This solution, though, is unsatisfactory in several ways. First, though it offers an explanation of Kant’s claim that the ideal of human beauty guides our judgments of taste about beautiful objects in nature, it doesn’t say anything

about how the idea might guide judgments of taste about art. Thus it remains unclear how the ideal of human beauty comes into play in judgments of taste regarding things like suites of furniture, music, or landscape paintings. But Kant, as Gibbons notes, claims that the archetype of taste guides “judgments of taste in general” (Gibbons,105). Though Gibbons offers an interesting account of how the ideal of human beauty might guide judgments of taste about nature, she has not solved the problem of how it guides all judgments of taste.

I believe Gibbons is right when she claims that the key to solving the problem about how the ideal of human beauty is also the ideal of taste lies in recognizing that the former expresses our rational nature. As I noted above, however, what the ideal of human beauty expresses, or symbolizes, is really more specific than our nature as purposive beings. What the ideal of human beauty is supposed to express, for Kant, is the “...intentional basis underlying the technic of nature, to which no separate individual, but only the race as a whole, is adequate...” (§17,233). Put more simply; the ideal of human beauty symbolizes the moral purpose of humanity. According to the second *Critique*, “...human nature is called to strive for the highest good” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:146).

For Kant, the claim that “human nature” is called upon to work towards the highest good means that the final end of humanity is to bring about a state of affairs in which (1) the wills of all human beings are such that their “dispositions are in complete conformity with the moral law,” and (2) all human beings partake in the amount of happiness that is proportionate to their virtue (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5: 110-111). Though I cannot here detail the intricacies of Kant’s account of the part played by the idea

of the highest good in moral reflection, it is important to point out the relevance of his notion of the highest good for understanding his claim that the ideal of human beauty expresses the “purpose” of the species. It is reasonable to assume, I think, that when Kant claims in the third *Critique* that the ideal of human beauty symbolizes the moral goal of humanity, part of what he means is that it expresses the highest good.

But, to return to the main theme of this section, it is admittedly difficult to see how the suggestion that the ideal of human beauty expresses the highest good will help us to solve the problem of why Kant seems to think that the ideal of human beauty is the archetype of taste. Here is how I think Kant’s view that the vocation of humanity is to seek to realize the highest good can be of help in interpreting his account of the ideal of taste. As I argued in my last section, we need to keep in mind that the ideal of taste is better thought of as a symbol of a perfect judgment of taste rather than an ideally beautiful object. So what we are looking for is some feature of judgments about human beauty that make them ideal judgments of taste, and for that reason suitable to serve as the ideal of taste.

To understand how some feature of a judgment about human beauty might guide all judgments of taste it is helpful to recall that, for Kant, it is a “maxim of judgment” to “think from the standpoint of everyone else” (§40,295). Kant calls this the “maxim of enlarged thought” (§40,295). Now, a maxim of judgment, for Kant, is not the same as a transcendental principle of judgment. A transcendental principle of judgment shows us what has to be presupposed for a particular kind of judgment to be possible. A maxim of judgment is just a guideline for judging; it tells us what we ought to aim for in our judgments. Kant’s maxim of enlarged thought tells us that, whenever possible, we should

adopt a universal point of view when judging. Another way of putting this is to say that the maxim of judgment instructs us to think from the point of view of “everyone else” (§40,295).

This suggests a picture of how, in general, one kind of judgment could serve as a model for others. A good judge, for Kant, always seeks to think from the point of view of all the others; she attempts to “enlarge her thought.” In so far as she successfully adopts the “universal” point of view, she is living up to the idea of a perfect judgment expressed in the maxim of enlarged thought. In the case of judgments of taste, the way to think from the point of view of the other is to insure that in one’s judgments of taste one “separates everything belonging to the agreeable and the good” from aesthetic pleasure, and judges based on that pleasure alone (§8,216).

We are now in a position to see how the ideal of human beauty might serve as the archetype of taste for Kant. Human beauty, as an expression of the moral destiny of humanity, can only be appreciated from the most “enlarged” point of view possible for us; the point of view of humanity as a species and its final purpose. The ideal of human beauty is for this reason especially well suited to serve as a symbolic presentation of taste’s aspiration to the universal. The ideal of human beauty represents to us in a particularly vivid fashion what every judgment of taste aims for, and what is reflected in the maxim of enlarged thought, the possibility of universal agreement in matters of taste. The ideal of human beauty can guide all judgments of and about taste, then, insofar as it is a symbolic presentation of the goal of all such judgments. More specifically, because judgments made according to the ideal of beauty are based in part on moral ideas, which

for Kant are manifestly universal, the ideal of human beauty can serve as a symbol of taste's goal of universal agreement.

One problem that remains for my interpretation of Kant's claim that the ideal of human beauty functions as the archetype of taste is that, even if it is granted that the ideal of human beauty symbolizes the goal of all judgments of taste, it is still difficult to see how a pure judgment of taste can be guided by an ideal and yet remain pure in Kant's sense. Since Kant holds that pure judgments of taste are made solely on the basis of the harmonious free play of the representational faculties, it seems odd for him to claim that pure judgments of taste are guided by a symbolic presentation of the goal of universal taste. But Kant does claim that "everything that is an Object of taste" is judged with reference to an ideal of taste (§17,232). Later, however, he asserts that judgments made according to an ideal are "not simple judgments of taste" (§17,236). This raises the question of whether Kant thinks we ever actually make a pure judgment of taste. That is, if Kant holds that all judgments about "objects of taste" involve the ideal of taste, and no judgment of taste made with reference to an ideal is a "simple judgment of taste," it looks like he is claiming that no actual judgment of taste is ever pure.

Gibbons' solution to this problem was to argue that the ideal of human beauty, while it does *not* guide pure aesthetic judgments, nevertheless serves to "enliven" our imagination in such a way that we are made more aware of the "purposiveness without purpose" displayed in beautiful natural forms. According to Gibbons' interpretation of Kant, then, the ideal of human beauty can be said to have a merely indirect role to play in judgments of taste.

My solution is somewhat different from what Gibbons proposes. I don't believe that Kant's claim that the ideal of taste guides all manifestations of taste entails that every judgment of taste involves the thought of the ideal of taste, or even that every judgment of taste is indirectly influenced by the thought of the ideal. What every judgment of taste does involve, for Kant, is a claim to universality; the ideal of human beauty provides us with a symbolic presentation of this claim. This is why Kant thinks that the ideal of beauty is well suited to serve as the ideal of taste. When Kant claims that all judgments of taste must be assessed according to the ideal of taste, he is calling attention to the fact that the ideal of taste, as a highest standard of taste, will affect the way all judgments of taste are made in the following respect. The ideal of taste, as a symbolic representation of the greatest universality possible for judgments of taste, will encourage us to work for the establishment of a "universal taste;" that is, general agreement concerning what is and what is not to be considered beautiful. Kant's point here is that once one conceives of taste as striving for an ideal of universality, taste itself is seen in a new way.

The fact that we conceive of taste in general as striving for an ideal state, however, does not entail that the thought of the ideal of taste is involved in any way when one makes, or attempts to make, a pure judgment of taste. The thought of the ideal of taste is not a necessary condition for pure aesthetic judgment, and pure judgments of taste do not explicitly involve the ideal of taste. Instead, the thought of the ideal of taste, provoked by reason's need for a unified universal taste, colors our thinking about all manifestations of taste once the thought of an ideal has been entertained.

IV. The Moral Significance of the Ideal of Taste

We are now in a position to appreciate the moral importance of the ideal of taste for Kant. Kant holds that the higher significance of the faculty of taste is only revealed when taste is brought into connection with the requirements and interests of practical reason. That is, we are led by reason to reflect on our capacity for aesthetic judgments in light of the interests of reason. As Guyer observes, it is reason that impels us to search for an ideal in the first place, and the identification of the ideal of human beauty as the only possible candidate for the ideal of taste will have important ramifications from the point of view of practical reason.⁶²

Guyer's explanation of the moral significance of the ideal of taste for Kant is roughly as follows. An ideal of beauty, according to Guyer, is a single maximally beautiful object that functions as the "highest model" of taste. Guyer's main interest in Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty concerns the question of our motivation in searching for an ideal. Why, Guyer asks, does Kant think we need an ideal of beauty at all? The answer to this question, as Guyer rightly observes, is that the ideal of beauty is sought in answer to a need of reason. Guyer's gloss on this is that the ideal of beauty, because it involves the expression of moral ideas, allows practical reason to represent to itself an important feature of our autonomy. That feature, according to Guyer, is the "uniqueness" of our moral vocation. That is, because the ideal of beauty is not only a maximally beautiful object, but also a uniquely beautiful one, it can become a symbol of our uniquely moral vocation. As Guyer puts it, "... a single ideal of beauty must be

⁶² Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, p.43.

sought precisely because practical reason is unique, the sole unconditioned and unconditional end of mankind.”⁶³

Though I agree with Guyer that, for Kant, practical reason seeks for an ideal of taste in response to its own interests, I don’t find his suggestion that what the ideal of taste symbolizes is the “uniqueness” of our moral vocation very helpful. For one thing, it is not easy to see the ideal of taste as a representation of uniqueness at all. Yes, human beauty is the only kind of beauty that gives us an ideal of taste, so it is unique in this sense, but its uniqueness does not seem to me to be a perspicuous part of what it symbolizes. I think one thing the moral content of the ideal expresses is that our vocation as rational beings is uniquely moral, but the meaning of the assertion that “practical reason is unique” is somewhat unclear to me. Guyer explains that practical reason’s uniqueness “...lies in the superiority of practical reason to all else.”⁶⁴ This amounts to the claim that practical reason is “superior to all else,” and hence unique. But if this is what the ideal of taste is supposed to represent, why not say that the ideal represents practical reason’s superiority to everything else. Again, the precise significance of the “uniqueness” of practical reason is hard to grasp.

In spite of my misgivings about Guyer’s claim that the ideal of taste symbolizes the uniqueness of practical reason, I think his suggestion that the ideal symbolizes some aspect of practical reason is a useful one. It is clear that, for Kant, the ideal of taste, and more specifically the ideal of human beauty, involves the symbolic presentation of moral ideas. Precisely what the ideal of taste might symbolize about practical reason itself, though, is hard to say. One place to start is with Guyer’s suggestion that the ideal of taste

⁶³ Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, p.43.

represents some aspect of Kant's doctrine of the "primacy of practical reason." I, like Guyer, believe that Kant's aesthetic theory needs to be read in light of his second *Critique* account of the primacy of practical reason.

Kant's account of the primacy of practical reason gives us a framework for seeing why our interest in locating a standard for taste is, at bottom, a moral interest. Roughly, what Kant means by the primacy of practical reason is as follows. Kant is concerned to solve a problem he sees regarding the relation between the interests of practical reason and the interests of theoretical reason. An "interest" of reason, for Kant, refers to the principles governing the "extension" of reason in its theoretical and practical uses (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:120). The interest of theoretical reason is the legitimate extension of knowledge "up to the highest a priori principles" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:120). Since theoretical reason is interested in the *legitimate* extension of knowledge, it is also interested in setting the proper limits for the extension of knowledge. As Kant puts it, the interest of theoretical reason involves a further interest in the "restriction of speculative mischief" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:120). The interest of practical reason is "...the determination of the *will* with respect to the final and complete end" (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:120). That is, practical reason is interested in bringing the actions of the will in conformity with what is required of us by the final end of practical reason. As we saw earlier, Kant holds that the final end of practical reason is to bring about the highest good in the world.

Since the interest of practical reason concerns, not just the determination of the will in accordance with what is demanded by the moral law, but also the possibility of

⁶⁴ Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, p.43.

actualizing those demands in conformity with the final goal of practical reason (the highest good), Kant argues that we need to decide whether the interest of theoretical reason in restricting speculative knowledge claims, or that of practical reason in promoting the highest good will be given precedence when the two interests seem to conflict with one another. Kant concludes that, insofar as practical reason has interests that are bound up inextricably with the demands of the moral law, and the satisfaction of those interests does nothing to contradict the restrictions on our knowledge imposed by the critical interests of theoretical reason, the interests of practical reason should be regarded as more important than those of theoretical reason in cases where the two kinds of interests seem to conflict. Another way Kant puts this is to say that “all interest is ultimately practical” (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:121).

One lesson of Kant’s discussion of the ideal of taste that relates directly to his doctrine of the primacy of practical reason is that our capacity to make pure judgments of taste must ultimately be viewed in light of reason’s interest in a standard, or ultimate ground, for universal taste. Following Kant’s claim in the second *Critique* that all the interests of reason are in the final analysis practical, we could interpret his claim in the third *Critique* that reason is interested in the possibility of an ideal of taste as meaning that it is of interest to us from a moral point of view that our judgments of taste be brought under an ideal. Exactly why this might be will become clearer when we examine Kant’s account of beauty as the symbol of morality. For now, I just wish to point out that if Kant’s argument in §17 is viewed in light of his claim concerning the primacy of practical reason, then what we might call the “real human worth” of even free beauty can

only be appreciated when such beauty is considered from the point of view of practical reason and its goals.

If there is some one aspect of practical reason that is especially symbolized by the ideal of taste, it is, I think, the highest good as the goal of practical reason. This is a reasonable conclusion, since Kant claims that the ideal of beauty involves an expression of the final goal of morality. This does not, however, necessarily exhaustively explain the moral significance of the ideal of taste. Further, as we will see in Kant's account of aesthetic ideas, symbols, for him, contain a surplus of meaning that resists conceptualization. This is in keeping with his claim, discussed earlier in this chapter, that symbols are not mere signs, but are the products of a mode of intuitive representation opposed to the discursive. Thus, though the ideal of human beauty may symbolize the final end of morality, it is not, on Kant's account, a mere sign designating what is contained in our concept of that goal.

Another important lesson of §17 is that beauty is capable of symbolizing various aspects of morality. In the case of human beauty, for example, Kant claims that we "read into" the human form the visible manifestation of our moral ends. We reflect on the human form as if it were the expression of the highest goal at which human beings as a species must aim. The ideal of human beauty, in turn, is able to serve as a symbolic representation of taste's aspiration to the universal. The ideal of human beauty symbolizes both our final moral end, and, as the ideal of taste, the goal of universal taste. Thus Kant's account of the ideal of taste is the first place in which he gives us a detailed discussion of how our capacity to make aesthetic judgments can enter into a fruitful partnership with practical reason. Though Kant remarks in §16 that "...strictly speaking,

perfection neither gains by beauty, nor beauty by perfection,” this does not entail that there is no gain at all resulting from the combination of rational ideas and aesthetic judgment (§16,231). There is, Kant suggests, a “...gain to the *entire faculty* of our representative power when harmony prevails between both states of mind” (§16,231).

What Kant gives us in his account of the ideal of taste, then, is an intimation of the important role moral ideas will ultimately play in his aesthetic theory. As I hope to show in my next chapter, Kant holds that the combination of judgments of taste with moral ideas has consequences he has only begun to suggest in §§16-17. More specifically, in Kant’s accounts of the sublime, the intellectual interest in the beautiful, and beauty as the symbol of morality, Kant offers a rich and complex picture of the various ways in which reason’s goals transform, and give importance to, a wide variety of aesthetic experiences.

Beauty, Morality, and Teleology

I. Introduction

In this chapter I examine the contribution Kant's account of beauty as the symbol of morality makes to Kant's project, announced in the Introduction of the third *Critique*, of bridging the "great gulf" between freedom and nature. As I read Kant, that contribution is roughly the following. Kant's thesis that beauty is the symbol of morality shows how the power of judgment enables us to form symbolic presentations of moral ideas. More specifically, the beauty of both art and nature allow the imagination to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature in so far as such beauty symbolically presents moral ideas.

There is a gulf between freedom and nature because the concept of freedom is a supersensible concept, or idea, the object of which cannot be given a sensible presentation, whereas the objects contained under the concept of nature can be given sensible presentations, but only as appearances (Introduction II, 175). But the ends of freedom are meant to be actualized in nature. According to Kant, we cannot *know* whether it is possible for the ends of freedom and the ends of nature to harmonize at the level of the supersensible. Nature is to this extent a closed book for us. But it is possible for us, through various aesthetic experiences, to form symbols that represent nature in such a way that this looked for harmony obtains.

Kant goes so far as to argue that, in the final analysis, all beauty, and especially natural beauty, can serve as a bridge between the sensible (nature) and the supersensible (freedom) in so far as it displays a harmony between mere forms in nature and the requirements of our cognitive capacities. Further, natural beauty strengthens teleological judgment's reflections concerning a possible ultimate harmony between the ends of freedom and the purposes of nature because such beauty seems to be the result of the design of an author of nature (though Kant strictly precludes knowledge that such is the

case). In these ways, then, the fact that beauty symbolizes morality helps us to form a reflective image of a deep harmony between freedom and nature.

It is important to realize that the problem that Kant is addressing here does not concern merely the compatibility of the realms of freedom and nature. That problem, as Paul Guyer has observed, was dealt with sufficiently by Kant in the first two *Critiques*. The third *Critique* problem that I am concerned with here has to do with the possibility of representing to ourselves the realization of the final end of morality *in nature*. The end enjoined on us by the moral law is the actualization of the highest good in nature.⁶⁵ But we have no way of knowing whether nature is such that the highest good can be actualized. To know this we would have to be able to view nature “supersensibly,” and determine that the supersensible underlying nature tends towards the realization of our moral ends. Since this is impossible, for Kant, he looks elsewhere for a “...ground of the *unity* of the supersensible that lies at the basis of nature with what the concept of freedom contains in a practical way...” (Introduction II, 176).

My aim in this chapter is to offer a reading of Kant’s account of beauty as the symbol of morality in light of both the theory of symbolism sketched in his account of fine art, and the conclusion to the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*. In the latter Kant discusses the proper application of the idea of purposiveness to the question about freedom and nature raised in the published introduction to the third *Critique*. What I hope to show is that Kant’s claim that beauty symbolizes morality is a central component of Kant’s thesis in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, as well as the key to his solution of the problem about the relation of freedom and nature discussed above.

As I read Kant, his theory that beauty is a symbol of morality is best understood as summing up the complex account of the role of reason in aesthetic appreciation and artistic creation he has been developing throughout the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. Here are the main stages of Kant's account as I read it: (1) In his account of pure judgments of taste Kant delineates the realm of the aesthetic in general as the realm of disinterested aesthetic responses to mere form in nature. Importantly, the disinterested free play of the faculties of the imagination and the understanding characteristic of aesthetic judgments, along with the universality and necessity attached to such judgments, forms the basis of an analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment which ultimately becomes a factor in our appreciation of beauty. (2) In Kant's account of free and dependent beauty, and especially in his discussion of the ideal of the beautiful, he makes it clear that judgments of taste may, and indeed must, be brought into connection with the goals of practical reason. Additionally, Kant argues that the ideal of human beauty, which crucially involves seeing human beauty as symbolic of moral ideas, can serve as the ideal of taste in general. (3) In Kant's theory of the sublime he highlights those features of our experience of nature that cause anxiety concerning the relationship of human freedom to the natural world, and shows how even this anxiety can symbolize a harmony between freedom and nature. (4) In his discussion of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, Kant claims that the fact that we encounter "free beauties" in nature leads us to view beautiful nature as if it were designed for our contemplative pleasure. This, in turn, leads us to hope that nature is at least not indifferent to the ends of practical reason. (5) Finally, in Kant's account of beauty as a symbol of morality he offers a summary

⁶⁵ See my chapter on the Ideal of Beauty for a discussion of this point.

account of his reflections on the relationship between the realms of freedom and nature. According to this account, the various connections between aesthetic and moral judgment mentioned above can be summed up in the thesis that beauty is the symbol of morality. Additionally, the claim that beauty symbolizes morality is now shown to be the key to the solution of the problem about the relation between the “realm of the concept of freedom” and the “realm of the concept of nature.”

My exposition of Kant’s account of beauty as the symbol of morality proceeds in three stages. First, I take up the question of what Kant means in the first place when he claims that beauty in general symbolizes morality. Since Kant’s thesis that beauty is the symbol of morality is essentially an elaboration of his idea that beauty expresses aesthetic ideas, I begin my first section with a consideration of his theory of aesthetic ideas. Second, I will argue that the role that beauty’s capacity to symbolize morality plays in Kant’s project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature is roughly parallel to its function in the resolution of the antinomy of taste. Finally, in my concluding section I attempt to show that Kant incorporated his thesis that beauty symbolizes morality into his argument concerning the nature and limits of teleological judgment in the second half of the third *Critique*.

II. Art and the Expression of Aesthetic Ideas

In this section my aim is to show in what ways Kant's account of beauty as the expression of aesthetic ideas, which occurs in the context of the development of his theory of fine art, is related to his later claim that beauty is the symbol of morality. The main ways in which I see the two as related are as follows. (1) The account of aesthetic ideas provides us with a theory of symbolism that helps to explain what Kant means in general when he calls one thing a "symbol" of another, and (2) Kant's claim that beauty in general can be described as the expression of aesthetic ideas prepares the way for his later claim that beauty in general is the symbol of morality.

In order to understand Kant's argument that beauty is the symbol of morality, the explicit topic of §59 of the third *Critique*, we need to look at his account of fine art, in which he develops the theory of symbolism amplified in the opening paragraphs of §59. Not only does Kant's account of aesthetic ideas involve the claim that fine art can provide us with symbols of rational ideas, but he also enigmatically asserts that all beauty, natural as well as artistic, is the expression of aesthetic ideas (§51,321). I explore this notion at greater length later on. First, though, I turn to an overview of Kant's account of fine art as the expression of aesthetic ideas.

Kant writes in §43 that "Art is distinguished from *nature* as making (*facere*) is from acting or operating in general (*agere*), and the product, or the result of the former is distinguished from that of the latter as *work* (*opus*) from operation (*effectus*)" (§43,303). Kant's answer to the question of how art differs from nature focuses on the way in which the products of each are brought about. Products of nature, as the result of efficient causes, are mere "effects." Products of art, on the other hand, are only possible "...through an act of the will that places reason at the basis of its actions" (§43,303). An

object is a “work,” for Kant, if “Its producing cause had an end in view to which the object owes its form” (§43,303).

The capacity to form the representation of an end and act according to it is, for Kant, a hallmark of rationality. Thus Kant contends that when we call something “art” we always mean “some work of man” (§43,303). The products of nature that seem to us to be art, say the “regularly constructed cells” of a beehive, are only regarded as such on the basis of an analogy with human art. Kant argues that, even though it may be the case that some sort of representation guides non-human animals in their productive activities, their behavior in such instances, since it is not an activity of reason, cannot strictly speaking be artistic. Consequently, “...as soon as we call to mind that no rational deliberation forms the basis of their labor, we say at once that it is a product of their nature (of instinct), and it is only to their creator that we ascribe it as art” (§43,303).

Kant next makes a distinction between the activities of art and science. Art should not be thought of as a science, nor can science be regarded as an art, because art requires, not mere theoretical knowledge, but also the skill to actually produce something. That is, art is essentially practical ability rather than theoretical knowledge; “...what one *can* do the moment one only *knows* what is to be done, hence without anything more that sufficient knowledge of the desired result, is not called art” (§43,303). In the case of art, observes Kant, full knowledge of what the effect is supposed to be does not give one the skill to accomplish it. This observation sets the stage for Kant’s definition of fine, as opposed to “mercenary,” art.

Fine art, for Kant, is a kind of “free art.” By “free art” Kant just means art that is not primarily an activity undertaken for the sake of something else (§43,304). The

production of free art is an intrinsically rewarding activity for the artist, and the products of free art please us, not through concepts, but to the extent that they promote a free play of the cognitive faculties. But this does not mean, as Kant makes clear, that free art is free in the sense that it entirely lacks “compulsion” and “mechanism.” An art that is entirely undisciplined, warns Kant, “would be bodyless and evanescent” (§43,304). In order to be successful, art must avoid the extremes of academic lifelessness and undisciplined freedom. For this reason, Kant holds that a good artist must combine taste with genius.

What Kant calls “aesthetic art” in general (as opposed to “mechanical” art) is an activity directed towards the production of pleasure (§44,305). Where the pleasure intended is one of mere sensation, as in a “gratifying dinner party,” aesthetic art is “agreeable” (§44,305). “Fine art” has as its goal the pleasure that results from the purposive free play of the faculties of understanding and imagination.

This preliminary definition of fine art is somewhat misleading given Kant’s ultimate view concerning what is distinctive about it. To be sure, the aim of fine art, for Kant, is to produce the purposive free play of the cognitive that issues in the judgment that a given object is beautiful. But Kant also holds that the capacity for fine art, genius, is more than the ability to create beautiful objects. To be considered a work of genius, for Kant, art must bear some relation to ideas, and especially moral ideas.

To return to Kant’s exposition of the production of fine art, then, he next argues that although fine art “must be recognized to be art and not nature,” the purposiveness displayed in its forms must appear to be as unrestrained by rules as the free beauties of nature (§45,306). Thus, just as natural forms must appear to be like art in order to be

judged beautiful, "...art can only be termed beautiful, where we are conscious of its being art, while yet it has the appearance of nature" (§45,306).

What is beautiful, for Kant, "pleases in the mere estimate of it" (§45,306). This is as true of the beauty of art as it is of nature's beauty. But the beauty of art actually is purposive, whereas the beauty of nature merely presents us with the appearance of design. The beauty of art, just because it is art, involves a concept of what the object is to be. That is to say, when we recognize a given object as an object of art we apply the concept of an artwork in general to that object. In order to become the object of a judgment of taste, though, a work of art must, as it were, disguise the fact that a concept served as the basis for its production. The art object must appear to be as free from the constraint of concepts as if it were a product of nature, while at the same time we recognize it as a product of art. Otherwise, Kant contends, it would be judged to be the product of a merely mechanical art (§45,306).

So art, in order to be beautiful, must in "aspect" be like nature. But exactly how can an object appear in some sense natural without actually appearing to *be* a product of nature? Kant's answer is that a beautiful work of art displays "...perfect *exactness* in the agreement with rules prescribing how alone the product can be what it is intended to be, but with an absence of *laboured effect*, (without academic form betraying itself), i.e. without a trace appearing of the artist having always had the rule present to him and of its having fettered his mental powers (§45,307)."

What Kant seems to be saying here is that a work of art, though it is obviously a product of design, must appear to be as gratuitous, as free from the constraint of rules, as natural beauty if it is to provoke the free play of the faculties of the understanding and the

imagination. If the concept governing the creation of a work of art is too much on the surface of that work, if it is first and foremost what the appreciator of the work encounters in it, then the cognitive faculties will not feel themselves free from the “constraint of concepts,” and the work will be judged to be a product of mechanical art.

Kant explains the capacity to create beauty in terms of “genius.” Genius, for Kant, is the faculty that makes the combination of purposiveness of form and freedom from rules (or the appearance of freedom from rules) in a work of art possible.⁶⁶ Kant writes that genius is first of all a “talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given” (§46,307). That is, products of genius display “originality.” But since what is original may also be “nonsense,” in order for a work to be considered a work of genius it must exhibit what Kant calls “exemplary originality.” Kant’s thought here is that a work of genius should display originality of a sort capable of serving as a standard for artistic creation and for taste.

Kant further holds that the source of the talent displayed in works of genius is inscrutable both to the genius himself and to others. Thus “...where an author owes a product to his genius, he does not himself know how the *ideas* for it have entered into his head, nor has he it in his power to invent the like at pleasure, or methodically, and communicate the same to others in such precepts as would put them in a position to produce similar products” (§46,308).

Not only is genius a product of nature in the sense that it is a natural talent, Kant also claims that genius is the means through which nature provides fine art with rules.

⁶⁶ Compare the following remarks of Wittgenstein. “Genius is what makes us forget the master’s talent.” “Genius is what makes us forget skill.” “Only where genius wears thin can you see the talent.” (*Culture and Value*. Translated by Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 43e).

Strictly speaking, for Kant, there can be no rules for the creation of fine art. The aim of fine art is to provoke the free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding. But such a free play of the cognitive faculties occurs precisely when there is no “definite concept” restricting them (§9,217). For this reason the production of fine art cannot be governed by rules based on “a concept of the way in which the object is possible” (§46,307). Kant’s thought here seems to be that if fine art were based on concepts in this direct way there would be nothing to distinguish fine art from mechanical art. Additionally, the concept would make it impossible for a judgment of taste to occur because it would stand in the way of the free play of the faculties of the imagination and the understanding that gives rise to aesthetic pleasure.

Still, Kant holds that calling an object a product of art rather than nature presupposes some rule according to which the object was produced. Otherwise we would not be moved to call such an object “art” at all. There are three distinct senses in which, for Kant, fine art is dependent on rules. The first two directly involve a concept of what the work is intended to be; while in the third examples take the place of rules. First, the very concept “art” presupposes a rational, and hence rule governed, activity. The thought that something *is* a work of art just is the thought that some object is only possible on the assumption of a will operating in accordance with rules contained in a prior conception of that object. The second way in which Kant takes art to involve rules concerns the appreciation of a work of art. A work of art, in addition to being the object of a judgment of taste, is also judged according to a concept of perfection. That is, the relative perfection of the work is taken into account in the estimation of it as a work of art.

Beethoven's symphonies, for example, could be judged to be both beautiful and the highest examples of the symphonic form.

Kant seems to hold that judgments about the perfection of an object, instead of constituting a distinct judgment, are incorporated into judgments of taste concerning works of art. Thus a judgment that a particular painting is beautiful, for example, is not a pure judgment of taste. Judgments of taste that have as their objects works of art are always in some way applications of concepts.

If...the object is presented as a product of art, and is as such declared to be beautiful, then, seeing that art always presupposes an end in the cause (and its causality), a concept of what the thing is to be must first of all be laid at its basis. And, since the agreement of the manifold in a thing with an inner character belonging to it as an end constitutes the perfection of a thing, it follows that in estimating beauty of art the perfection of the thing must also be taken into account... (§48,311).

Kant, then, does hold that the production of art requires rules. But the rules cannot be such that they prevent the free play of the imagination and the understanding that forms the basis of judgments of taste from occurring. The imagination must feel itself free of the constraint of rules when making an aesthetic judgment. What takes the place of the rule in the case of fine art, as we have seen, is the exemplary originality of products of genius. A work of art is exemplary, for Kant, in so far as it is capable of inspiring other artists to create original works of their own. It is important, for Kant, that one artist's imitation of another is not mere "copying." A work of genius, for Kant, is an example for others to follow, but what is exemplary in such works is the originality of genius itself rather than some particular style, technique, or content of the work.

Kant's theory can be illustrated by considering what he takes to be the procedure of the artist beginning her work. Instead of merely looking to concepts of how a work of art is to be created, the artist, in addition, looks to the example of other artists and their works for inspiration. This is not mere copying. The artist "imitates" the work of other geniuses, allowing their works to serve as a guide for her own creative imagination. The precise nature of Kant's distinction between "copying" and "imitation" is left somewhat obscure, but the idea is that works of genius take the place of rules for art by inspiring others similarly endowed to creative activity of their own.

Kant is now ready to introduce the notion of the aesthetic idea. He first observes that we do not call a work of art "fine art" merely because it is a beautiful presentation of an object. We demand that works of art possess "spirit" (*Geist*) as well. Spirit, for Kant, refers both to the quality found in the object of an aesthetic judgment whereby it promotes the free play of the cognitive faculties, and to the "animating principle" in the mind of the artist that allows him to produce works that display that quality. Accordingly, following Kant, we might say both that the paintings of Jackson Pollock manifest "spirit," and that Pollock is a "spirited" artist, or, what is the same for Kant, a genius.

The capacity to endow works of art with spirit, Kant explains, is best regarded as the "faculty of presenting *aesthetic ideas*" (§49,314). An aesthetic idea is a "representation of the imagination" made possible by the imagination's capacity to form symbolic representations that are indirectly linked to moral ideas. Such symbols engender in our minds a series of associations that resists conceptualization, while at the same time impelling us to seek for a concept. Kant regards the mind as "at play" when it

forms and contemplates aesthetic ideas, but , as we shall see, this is an important kind of play because it raises the mind to the level of ideas through an act of imaginative association. We judge a work of art to have spirit, for Kant, if that work provokes this sort of play in our cognitive faculties.

The most important contribution Kant's account of genius makes to his larger project of articulating the moral significance of beauty is the notion of art as the expression of aesthetic ideas. Aesthetic ideas, for Kant, are representations of the imagination that provoke more thought than can be contained in a concept, making them the converse of rational ideas, which are concepts for which no intuitive presentation can be found (§49,314).

What will become especially significant for Kant about our capacity for producing aesthetic ideas is precisely this close relationship between aesthetic and rational ideas. Kant justifies the somewhat paradoxical term "aesthetic ideas" in two ways. His first justification is that aesthetic ideas, because they aim to represent what is contained in rational ideas, but which is by definition unable to be directly presented, become indirect presentations of rational ideas. Kant notes that aesthetic ideas "...at least strain after something lying out beyond the confines of experience, and so seek to approximate to a presentation of rational concepts...thus giving to these concepts the semblance of an objective reality" (§49,314). Aesthetic ideas make it seem as if rational ideas could be given sensible expression, while at the same time we are aware that the sensible presentation through which the idea is expressed is not strictly speaking an *example* of what is contained in the idea. We might, for example, imaginatively regard a particularly virtuous character in a play or novel as representing the idea of virtue, and at the same

time recognize the impossibility of any individual person actually measuring up to the standard of perfection contained in the idea of virtue.

Kant's second justification for the term "aesthetic idea" is that such presentations are "inner intuitions" for which no concept is "adequate" (§42,314). Aesthetic ideas mimic the satisfaction of reason's demand for the unconditioned by supplying us with presentations that seem to reach to the supersensible. Kant's thought here is that we are justified in our use of the term "aesthetic idea" because aesthetic ideas are capable of "indirectly presenting" what is contained in rational ideas.

The capacity of genius will, for this reason, be best served by the art of poetry, which, for Kant, is first and foremost the art of using language to provide symbolic presentations of rational ideas. Thus poetry ranks highest among the fine arts because of the relative ease with which language can suggest symbols of moral ideas. Kant offers the following examples of poetry's power to symbolize moral ideas.

The poet essays the task of interpreting to sense the rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, eternity, creation, &c. Or, again, as to things of which examples also occur in experience, e.g. death, envy, and all vices, as also love, fame, and the like, transgressing the limits of experience he attempts with the aid of an imagination which emulates the display of reason in its attainment of a maximum, to body them forth to sense with a completeness of which nature affords no parallel... (§42,314).

This account of how the poet employs aesthetic ideas to represent rational ideas actually furnishes the clearest picture Kant supplies us of the way in which he takes aesthetic ideas to be related to rational ideas. An aesthetic idea, as Kant has already said, aims to provide a representation that determines, or provides an example of, what is contained conceptually in a rational idea. But rational ideas cannot be given examples,

or, as Kant puts it, “determined,” at all. Rational ideas are both indeterminate and indeterminable. The aesthetic idea is the result of an attempt by the imagination to reflectively “determine” an indeterminable concept.

Importantly, Kant does not rule out the possibility of art expressing ideas other than moral ideas, and even suggests that art can serve as the expression of empirical concepts. When Kant refers to works of art that express “things of which examples also occur in experience” he cites as examples “death, envy, and all the vices” (§42,314). In these cases, the artist is not aiming to symbolically represent a specific rational idea. Instead, the artist produces representations based on empirical concepts, but which suggest a “completeness of which nature affords no parallel” (§49,314). Kant’s thought here is that the work of art makes the representation of an empirical concept *seem like* a presentation of ideas. The artist is able to do this by producing a representation of an object that is met with in experience, but in such a way that more is suggested by the representation of the object than can be contained in any concept. Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, for example, could be said to suggest more about death, and its significance for human life, than is contained in the concept “death.” The point here is that an aesthetic representation of a familiar thing can make it seem as if that thing could only be comprehended by “raising the mind to the level of ideas.” That is, by elevating the mind to the level of concepts of reason; concepts, which, for Kant, refer to that which lies beyond the bounds of a possible experience.⁶⁷

It would also be possible, I think, for works of art to convey aesthetic ideas that indirectly represent ideas of theoretical reason like the idea of the “sum total of the

possible,” the idea of “substance,” or the idea of “the self.” These ideas are regulative for the use of theoretical reason, rather than practical reason, and Kant’s discussion of fine art and aesthetic ideas fails to mention them. One plausible reason for this omission is that it simply never occurred to Kant that art was capable of addressing itself to ideas as abstract as these. Or, perhaps if such works were known to Kant he would have classified them as instances of the sublime rather than the beautiful. In any case, nothing in what Kant says about art as the expression of aesthetic ideas rules out works of this sort.

Even though Kant explicitly recognizes that aesthetic ideas do not always symbolize rational ideas, he holds that the most significant task of art is the indirect presentation of moral ideas. Art that lacks any connection to morality, for Kant, is mere play.

Where fine arts are not, either proximately or remotely, brought into combination with moral ideas...they then only serve for a diversion, of which one continually feels an increasing need in proportion as one has availed oneself of it as a means of dispelling the discontent of one’s mind, with the result that one makes oneself ever more and more unprofitable and dissatisfied with oneself (§52,326)

So Kant, while he does not claim that works of art as such always express moral ideas, does hold that the only art of lasting significance is art that supplies us with indirect, or symbolic, presentations of moral ideas.

I now return to my discussion of Kant’s theory of the symbolic mode of presentation. The relevant comparison here, as Kant makes plain in §59, is with the schematic mode of presentation, in which a pure concept of the understanding is supplied with an intuition a priori (§59,351). Kant holds that there are two main kinds of

⁶⁷ For a particularly clear discussion ideas, and how to distinguish them from empirical concepts and pure

“hypotyposis,” or sensible presentation, which the imagination is able to perform. In the first kind, the schematic, an intuition corresponding to a pure concept of the understanding is given a priori by the imagination (§59,351). This is what occurs in determinative judgments that are a priori and synthetic. In such cases, for Kant, concepts are provided with “direct presentations.”

Poetic presentations of ideas are in some obvious ways different from schematic presentations of pure concepts of the understanding, and from the kinds of examples the imagination can come up with for empirical concepts. What the poet whose subject is ideas is attempting to do is to provide us with sensible presentations of moral ideas. In the first *Critique*, Kant took a dim view of the efforts of poets to present moral ideas.

...to attempt to realize the ideal in an example, that is, in the [field of] appearance, as, for instance, to depict the [character of the perfectly] wise man in a romance, is impracticable. There is indeed something absurd, and far from edifying, in such an attempt, inasmuch as the natural limitations, which are constantly doing violence to the completeness of the idea, make the illusion that is aimed at altogether impossible, and so cast suspicion on the good itself- the good that has its source in the idea-by giving it the air of being a mere fiction (A570/B598).

In the third *Critique*, however, Kant’s account of aesthetic ideas allows the possibility of the “indirect” presentation of moral ideas. The “indirect,” or symbolic, mode of presentation functions, for Kant, in roughly the following way. The imagination searches for “secondary representations” that can be linked to a rational idea by analogy. Kant calls these representations the “aesthetic attributes” of an idea in order to contrast them with the “logical attributes” of ideas (§49,315). The latter would directly represent

concepts of the understanding, see *Prolegomena* §§40–46.

what is contained in a concept, and so are ruled out in the case of the aesthetic representation of ideas. An aesthetic attribute, for Kant, is whatever may be successfully used as a symbol for an idea. Kant's example here is that of "Jupiter's eagle" depicted with lightning in its claws as an aesthetic attribute of the god Jupiter (§49,315).

Kant's idea seems to be that because "Jupiter" stands for the idea of a divine being, an idea for which no direct representation can be given, all of the representations which we associate with Jupiter must be regarded as symbols, or aesthetic attributes, of the idea of Jupiter. Kant further claims that the imaginative web of associations which symbols of this kind provoke in us are what make aesthetic ideas possible. The aesthetic attribute, writes Kant,

...gives the imagination an incentive to spread its flight over a whole host of kindred representations that provoke more thought than admits of expression in a concept determined by words. They furnish an *aesthetic idea*, which serves the ...rational idea as a substitute for logical presentation, but with the proper function, however, of animating the mind by opening out for it a prospect into a field of kindred representations stretching beyond its ken (§49,315).

There appear to be two distinct levels at which the potential of the imagination for symbolic presentation is being exploited by Kant here. First, the artist searches out aesthetic attributes for a given rational idea. But these attributes are just the "secondary representations" with which the artist will attempt to portray the idea, and not the aesthetic idea itself. It is only the *affect* of the aesthetic attributes on the imagination, the boundless play of associations that reminds us of the boundlessness of ideas, that allows us to regard aesthetic attributes as an aesthetic idea that indirectly presents a given rational idea. So there are two conditions that must be satisfied in order to successfully

present an aesthetic idea that symbolizes a rational idea; first, the aesthetic attributes of the rational idea must be presented to the imagination, second, those attributes need to provoke an imaginative free play of the cognitive faculties which induces in us a feeling of a boundless chain of cognitive associations.

Kant uses the term “aesthetic idea” to refer to the mental state of the genius who creates a work of art, and the work of art through which the idea is communicated is then the “expression” of the aesthetic idea. This is why Kant defines genius as the ability to communicate the mental state produced by the aesthetic attributes connected with a given rational idea. Kant writes in §49 that “...genius properly consists in the happy relation, which science cannot teach nor industry learn, enabling one to find out ideas for a given concept, and, besides, to hit upon the *expression* for them- the expression by means of which the subjective mental condition induced by the ideas as the concomitant of a concept may be communicated to others” (§49,317). A genius, then, is one who has a special talent for finding aesthetic ideas for given rational ideas, and has the ability to express those ideas tastefully in beautiful works of art.

Arguably, the most important consequence of the capacity to seek out aesthetic ideas for rational ones is that it makes the sensible presentation of moral ideas possible. Accordingly, Kant’s third *Critique* view regarding the value of poetry that aims to represent moral ideas is strikingly different from the one articulated in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Whereas in the first *Critique* Kant held that the effort to depict a virtuous person in a “romance” was morally dangerous because, by its own inadequacy to present moral ideas, it made the good itself seem frivolous, in the third *Critique* Kant writes that poetry is the most praiseworthy of the fine arts because “It expands the mind by giving

freedom to the imagination and by offering, from among the boundless multiplicity of possible forms accordant with a given concept, to whose bounds it is restricted, that one which couples with the presentation of the concept a wealth of thought to which no verbal expression is completely adequate, and by thus rising aesthetically to ideas" (§53,326). In this way, the very feature that led Kant to be suspicious of artistic representations of virtue in the first *Critique*, the fact that such representations attempt to present moral ideas, in the third *Critique* ends up elevating the poetic arts to first rank among the fine arts. Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas, then, both allows him to explain how art enables us to furnish indirect representations of rational ideas, and leads to a remarkable reversal in his assessment of the worth of poetry that attempts the imaginative portrayal of the moral.

III. Beauty as the Symbol of the Morally Good

We have seen that, for Kant, works of fine art express aesthetic ideas. Since aesthetic ideas can serve as the indirect presentation of moral ideas, Kant takes himself to have established that fine art can be a valuable tool for the expression of moral ideas. Kant next claims that even natural beauty can be regarded as the expression of aesthetic ideas. He writes in §51 that, "Beauty (whether it be of nature or of art) may in general be termed the *expression* of aesthetic ideas" (§51,321).

Though it might seem odd that Kant would think that natural beauty, the object of pure judgments of taste, could express ideas, I think that Kant's view can be explained in roughly the following way. In the case of the beauty of fine art, the faculty of genius is responsible for making the association between beauty and ideas. The capacity of the

artist for expressing such ideas leads us to treat works of fine art as if they were capable of representing the supersensible. The key to understanding Kant's claim that natural beauty expresses aesthetic ideas lies in his earlier remark that nature, in order to be regarded as beautiful, "must wear the appearance of art" (§45,306). Just as fine art, in order to be successful, had to be like nature in its freedom from the constraint of rules, nature has to in some way resemble a work of art in order to be beautiful. The precise way in which nature resembles art, for Kant, is that it mimics the purposiveness of art. Beautiful nature, as Kant argues in §42, appears to be designed for our contemplative pleasure. This appearance of design, or purposiveness without purpose, engages our cognitive faculties in an imaginative free play. This free play of the faculties alone, in the case of natural beauty, is "sufficient for awakening and communicating the idea of which that Object is regarded as the expression" (§51,320).

The idea Kant claims is communicated by natural beauty is the idea of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties (§42,310). Since, as Kant will claim in §57, the idea of the purposiveness of nature is an idea of the supersensible, the claim that natural beauty communicates to us the idea of the purposiveness of nature entails that the beauty of nature is a symbolic representation of the supersensible. Kant does not claim that natural beauty is a *direct* representation of the supersensible. Instead, Kant holds that the fact that we find various forms in nature beautiful must be regarded as the result, not of a plan of nature according to which beauty exists for human beings, but of a fortunate harmony between the ends of nature and our subjective ends. "[Natural beauty] ...is only a supervening final harmony with the needs of our faculty of judgment in its

relation to nature and the forms which nature produces in accordance with particular laws, and one that it is independent of an ends, spontaneous and contingent” (§57,347).⁶⁸

The capacity of both natural and artistic beauty to serve as the expression of ideas is taken up again in §59, where Kant offers a more detailed explanation of his position. Kant’s explanation there, as we shall see, turns on an analogy between the cognitive activities involved in a judgment of taste and those brought into play in moral judgment. This analogy makes it possible to regard beauty in general as the symbol of the morally good.

As I interpret Kant, his thesis that beauty is the symbol of morality is meant as an elaboration of his claim, made in the resolution to the antinomy of taste in §57, that judgments of taste are based on an idea of the supersensible. I examine Kant’s resolution of the antinomy in some detail later. For now I just wish to point out that there is good reason to think that §59 on beauty as the symbol of morality can be read as an elaboration of the resolution to the antinomy. More specifically, the claim that beauty symbolizes the morally good is designed to show how the thought of the supersensible is able to enter into and guide judgments of taste given that we are the kinds of creatures who require intuitions to “lend reality” to our concepts (§59,351). To put the point in a slightly different way, Kant has to show how the idea of the supersensible, which, as an idea, is a concept for which we can supply no intuition, can be regulative in the domain of taste given that judgments of taste cannot appeal to a determinate concept of beauty as a standard. Kant’s solution to this problem is to propose that, due to a close analogy

⁶⁸ For a fuller discussion of these points see my chapter on the intellectual interest in the beautiful. As it will turn out, Kant claims that natural beauty may be regarded as if it were an end of nature’s once

between moral and aesthetic judgment, beauty in general symbolizes morality. In this way, as Kant puts it, it becomes possible to “use beauty as a schema for the supersensible” (§53,327).

In §59 Kant goes further in connecting beauty to moral ideas by announcing that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” (§59,354). What Kant means by this is not merely, as he has already claimed, that beauty expresses aesthetic ideas which can be regarded as indirect presentations of aesthetic ideas. Kant is now asserting that, just as there is a fortuitous harmony between beautiful forms in nature and the needs of our cognitive faculties that results in our taking a disinterested pleasure in those forms, there is also an unlooked for formal harmony between the activity of aesthetic judgment itself and moral judgment that allows us to regard all beauty as the symbol of morality. That is, there is a series of analogies between what occurs cognitively in the appreciation of beauty and what occurs cognitively in moral judgment. These analogies are what make beauty in general a suitable symbol for morality.

Kant elaborates on the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment as follows:

(1) Moral judgments and judgments of taste are alike in bringing with them an immediate pleasure; the beautiful object pleases immediately through the free play of the cognitive faculties, and the good pleases immediately through its concept. (2) Moral judgments and judgments are both disinterested, though in the case of moral judgment an interest results. (3) Both judgments of taste and moral judgments involve a spontaneously lawful relation between certain cognitive faculties. In judgments of taste the “freedom of the imagination ...is, in estimating the beautiful, represented as in accord with the

teleological reflection has established the legitimacy of a picture of nature as a purposive whole. From the

understanding's conformity to law" (§59,354). In moral judgments the will is thought of as free precisely because it acts in harmony with itself alone in accordance with "universal laws of reason" (§59,354). (4) Moral judgments and judgments of taste both involve a claim to be universally valid. Moral judgments are represented as universally valid on the basis of the objective validity of the principles of morality. Judgments of taste are represented as subjectively universal. We demand of others that they take pleasure in what we judge to be beautiful, but we cannot expect that this agreement actually obtains. This is because the universality of the beautiful, unlike that of the good, is not based on any determinate concept (§59,354).

This is the analogy as Kant presents it in §59, though he hints that what he outlines there is only a small part of what could be said when he writes that his aim is to "...bring out a few points of this analogy, while taking care, at the same time, not to let the points of difference escape us" (§59,353). But Kant clearly thinks that he has detailed enough of the analogy to support his claim that beauty is the symbol of the morally good. How is this so? I think the best way to understand Kant's argument here is to read it in light of the account of symbolism begun in §49 and elaborated upon in the opening of §59.

According to Kant's earlier account of aesthetic ideas, what makes it possible for us to produce symbolic presentations of moral ideas is our capacity to come up with "aesthetic attributes" for given rational ideas. These aesthetic attributes, for Kant, engender in the mind a boundless play of associations which make it possible to produce an aesthetic idea. Kant further explains our capacity for symbolism in §59. The

point of view of aesthetic judgment, though, nature's beauty must be regarded as contingent.

symbolic, for Kant, is the mode of presentation that allows us to form “indirect” intuitive presentations of rational ideas. Kant describes the procedure followed by the faculty of judgment in coming up with symbolic presentations as follows.

Schemata contain direct, symbols indirect, presentations of the concept. Schemata effect this presentation demonstratively, symbols by the aid of an analogy (for which recourse is had even to empirical intuitions), in which analogy judgment performs a double function: first in applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then, secondly, in applying the mere rule of its reflection upon that intuition to quite another object, of which the former is but the symbol (§59,352).

Kant is claiming that an act of reflective judgment that produces a symbol actually involves two distinct judgments. First, there is a determinative judgment in which a concept is applied to an object of sensible intuition. Next, the rule applied in the case of the determinative judgment is used to reflect on an object not contained in the original concept. Thus, to take Kant’s example, even though the concept of an “animate body” would not ordinarily applied to a “constitutional monarchy,” it is possible to notice similarities between the rules of reflection in each case. This similarity allows us to use one kind of object as a symbol of another in cases where the objects themselves display no similarity with one another (§59,352). In this way, to return to Kant’s example, an animate body can serve as a symbol of a constitutional monarchy, though it is clearly not an example of one (§59,352).

In order for beauty in general to be capable of serving as a symbol of morality, then, there must be similarities between the rules of reflection applied in the case of moral judgment, and the procedure of reflective judgment in making a judgment of taste.

Kant’s analogy is meant to demonstrate that there are significant similarities between the

procedure of judgment in the case of moral and aesthetic judgment. These similarities make it possible for us to regard the beautiful as the symbol of the morally good. This much is clear from Kant's elucidation of the thesis that beauty symbolizes morality as it is presented in §59. One important question that can be raised, though, and which commentators have attempted to answer in various ways, is precisely what two items Kant has in mind when he writes that "beauty" symbolizes the "morally good."

There are many ways one could attempt to answer this question. Ted Cohen, for example, interprets Kant as claiming that a beautiful object symbolizes a good will.⁶⁹ Guyer gives good reasons for supposing that Kant thought that the experience of beauty could be taken as a symbol of the supersensible ground of moral action, while at the same time recognizing that Kant's own exposition of the thesis that beauty is the symbol of morality seems to support a much weaker interpretation according to which calling beauty the symbol of the good is just another way of indicating the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment mentioned in §42.⁷⁰ John Zammito, on the other hand, favors a more metaphysical reading according to which the upshot of Kant's thesis is that beauty in all its manifestations can be regarded as expressing ideas of the supersensible, and art in particular is "...a vehicle for the expression of religious and rational ideas" (289).⁷¹

My interpretation follows Zammito's in one important respect; I think that when Kant claims that beauty is the symbol of morality he means that all instances of beauty symbolically present moral ideas. As I read Kant, there is no one thing about morality,

⁶⁹ Ted Cohen. "Why beauty is a Symbol of Morality," in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*. Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer eds. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.236.

⁷⁰ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of taste*, 338.

⁷¹ John H. Zammito. *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

such as a “good will,” that beauty is supposed to symbolize beauty. Instead, there are many ways beauty can be imaginatively connected to moral ideas through our capacity to regard the beautiful as expressive of the moral. Following Kant’s earlier account of the way in which aesthetic ideas are formed out of a “boundless” play of symbolic associations, and due to the possibility of drawing an elaborate analogy between the activities of moral and aesthetic judgment, the beautiful is able to symbolize the moral in a virtually limitless number of ways. The beauty of art can symbolize specific moral ideas like, for example, virtue and courage. Or beauty can indicate morality in a more general way, as in the experience of natural beauty as a symbol of the purposiveness of nature.

The role of the analogy Kant partially develops in §59, on this reading, would be to demonstrate that there is a significant similarity between the “rules of reflection” governing our thinking about moral judgments and judgments of taste. If there were no such similarity the designation of beauty as the symbol of morality would be merely arbitrary.

To elaborate on Kant’s own earlier example, not just any item can be used to symbolize a constitutional monarchy. Kant suggests a “living body” because he takes it that there are significant similarities between the way we reflect about living bodies, and our reflections concerning constitutional monarchies. For example, we might say in both cases that the whole was healthy as the result of mutually cooperating parts. But, as Kant observes, the similarity is not between the two objects themselves. Instead, we tend to think about each of the objects in ways that exhibit marked similarities.

The case is the same with beauty and morality for Kant. There is a striking analogy between moral judgment and aesthetic judgment that allows us to suggest symbolic relationships between beauty and morality. Only now, unlike the case of the healthy body that symbolizes a constitutional monarchy, the result of the analogy is not merely a symbolic relationship between two objects. Indeed, it would be strange if this were the result because “beauty” and “morality” aren’t even singular objects to begin with, but are more like “domains.”⁷² Kant’s observation is that there are many symbolic relationships that can be drawn between objects in the domain of the beautiful and objects in the domain of morality. What Kant gives us in the analogy as presented in §59 is a sketch of the key similarities between moral judgments and judgments of taste that make these symbols possible.

Following Kant’s earlier account of aesthetic ideas, then, we could interpret Kant as claiming that the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment makes it possible for us to suggest many things about morality using beautiful objects as symbols, or aesthetic attributes, of moral ideas. According to Kant’s account of aesthetic ideas, an aesthetic idea, in the fullest sense of the term, is a pairing of a seemingly boundless play of aesthetic attributes with a rational idea. The aesthetic idea can be regarded as a symbolic presentation of the rational one, but only because of the free play of associations that the aesthetic attributes provoke in the imagination. The free play of the imagination is essential in this regard because it approximates the “striving towards the supersensible” that characterizes the effect of rational ideas on the mind (§48,314). An aesthetic idea, as Kant puts it, is the “pendant,” or exact counterpart, of a rational idea. It is only due to this

⁷² Kant suggests this terminology in the introduction when he uses the term “domain” to refer to everything

relation between moral and aesthetic ideas, according to Kant, that we are entitled to speak of the latter as ideas in the first place; aesthetic ideas can be called “ideas” because they are like rational ideas in their effect on the cognitive faculties.

Kant takes himself to have shown in the resolution of the antinomy of taste that the indeterminate idea to which judgments of taste refer is the idea of the supersensible substrate of appearances. Kant now claims that the fact that we are “naturally” led to regard what is beautiful as a symbol of the good explains the manner in which all judgments of taste refer to the supersensible. “This [the morally good] is that *intelligible* to which taste, as noticed in the preceding paragraph, extends its view” (§59,353). All judgments of taste can be taken to refer to the supersensible precisely because we are naturally inclined to regard our various experiences of beauty as aesthetic attributes of the idea of morality. That is to say, we take beauty in general to symbolize morality.

It must be stressed here that by calling beauty the symbol of morality Kant has not committed himself to the claim that any one attribute, or set of attributes, belonging to the beautiful symbolizes morality. Instead, as I have been arguing, the upshot of Kant’s claim is that, due to an analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment, we have a natural predisposition to think of beauty in terms of morality. This is supposed to explain among other things, why we readily use moral terminology in our evaluations of aesthetic objects (§59,354).

One might argue, as Guyer has suggested, that Kant’s assertion that beauty is the symbol of morality entails nothing beyond what he had already argued in §42; that there are significant analogies between the procedure of judgment in the appreciation of beauty

that falls under the concepts of nature, on the one hand, and of freedom, on the other (Introduction,III,177).

and the procedure of judgment in moral reflection.⁷³ As Guyer observes, Kant's explanation of the moral significance of the intellectual interest in the beautiful is that we habitually regard the beautiful in light of the moral due to certain "structural similarities between aesthetic and moral judgment."⁷⁴ Guyer rightly regards Kant's account of the analogy in §59 as an elaboration of the structural similarities between moral and aesthetic judgment referred to in the account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful, but he also seems to think that this is all Kant should mean by the claim that beauty is the symbol of morality.

To the extent that Kant's general analysis of symbolism does dictate what he means in calling one thing a symbol of another, these analogies should exhaust the content of the assertion that beauty is a symbol of morality. A beautiful object is a sensible particular which can be taken to symbolize something like morality to which no sensible intuition is adequate just because there are these analogies between judgments upon the two objects.⁷⁵

This seems right in terms of explaining what Kant's justification for the claim that beauty is the symbol of morality is, but it by no means explains the more general import of Kant's claim. As Guyer notices, Kant himself goes far beyond an analysis of the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment when he begins to explain how our actual aesthetic judgments merge with moral reflection. The analogy is merely Kant's explanation of what makes beauty in general a suitable symbol for morality. The role of the analogy is to demonstrate that there is a significant likeness between what Kant has been calling the "rules of reflection" operant in judgments of taste and in moral

⁷³ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 334.

⁷⁴ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 334.

⁷⁵ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 336.

judgments. But when Kant claims that beauty in general is the symbol of the morally good he is referring, not just to the analogies which make such a symbolic relationship possible, but to the way the resulting symbols get incorporated into our actual aesthetic judgments. He is referring, that is, to the wide range of ways in which we imaginatively link beauty with morality. Similarly, we could analyze what specific analogies between our respective reflections about hand mills and despotic states make it possible to use the former as a symbol of the latter, but if we wanted to understand the more general significance of the symbolism employed in our reflections on political matters we would have to look at the various ways such symbols are employed in actual judgments.

It is true that Kant doesn't offer much in the way of an account of what the symbols of morality that beauty provides us with are like in §59. One reason this might be, I think, is that Kant takes himself to have been showing us the various ways beauty symbolizes morality all along. Kant's thesis that beauty symbolizes the morally good can be read as a kind of metaphorical synopsis of his entire account of taste. Kant's idea seems to be that, due to a significant analogy between the cognitive activities involved in moral judgments and in judgments of taste, we are naturally led to regard the various manifestations of beauty as indirect presentations of moral ideas.

Finally, it is important to recognize that Kant's claim that beauty is the symbol of morality does not reduce the beautiful to the morally good. Kant's claim is that judgments of taste are analogous with, not identical to, moral judgments. And, as Kant observes about his own example of a handmill as a symbol of a despotic state, there is "certainly no similarity" between the objects themselves. Beauty and morality themselves are by no means alike; what displays a likeness is our manner of reflecting about both.

There could, of course, be no analogy between beauty and morality if one was actually reducible to the other. In order to be analogous, the items paired must be in some quite significant ways unlike one another (as Kant insists is the case). So, as Ted Cohen has rightly observed, Kant is among those few philosophers who "...identify a point at which the beautiful and the moral come together, but who do not reduce the one to the other."⁷⁶

IV. Judgments of Taste and the Supersensible

In this section I examine Kant's baffling and contentious claim, made in the resolution of the antinomy of taste, that all judgments of taste are in some way based on the indeterminate idea of the supersensible. First, though, I attempt a short summary of Kant's account of the connection between judgments of taste and the supersensible in his account of taste so far. The purpose of doing this is not primarily to explain Kant's claim that judgments of taste are based on the supersensible. Rather, my goal is just to provide a framework for the more detailed discussion of the connection between taste, the supersensible, and beauty as the symbol of morality that follows.

Kant's accounts of the intellectual interest in beauty, the ideal of taste, and of beauty as the expression of aesthetic ideas all posit a connection between the experience of beauty and ideas. In the case of the intellectual interest in the beautiful our desire to see moral ideas confirmed by nature leads us to view natural beauty as if it were intended by nature for our contemplative delight. Similarly, Kant supposes that the widespread general agreement in matters of taste found across cultures impels us to seek for an ideal,

⁷⁶ Ted Cohen, "Why Beauty is the Symbol of Morality," p.221.

or highest example, of taste. And in the case of fine art Kant contends that the only truly significant art is art that is connected to moral ideas.

In all of the above cases, and in the sublime as well, moral ideas and aesthetic experience intersect. For Kant, a rational idea, properly speaking, is a concept of reason for which no intuition can be supplied because they represent a completeness not to be met with in a possible experience. That is, ideas are concepts of what is supersensible. Since moral ideas are a kind of rational idea, Kant has already indicated a number of significant connections between judgments of taste and the supersensible.

In his resolution to the antinomy of taste Kant proposes a deeper connection between taste and the supersensible. Now, instead of claiming that beauty symbolizes ideas the objects of which are supersensible (e.g. perfect virtue), Kant claims that judgments of taste are based on an idea *of* the supersensible. One way of reading Kant's new claim, the claim that all judgments of taste are based on the supersensible, is as follows. Kant could be claiming that all judgments of taste are based on a single idea; the idea of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties. Kant identifies this idea as an idea of the supersensible at §57,347. It makes sense for Kant to claim this, since judgments of taste, as examples of reflective judgment, involve a specific application of the transcendental principle of purposiveness. Insofar as they are applications of this principle, then, judgments of taste are based on an idea of the supersensible.

Kant further claims that the idea of the supersensible as a subjective principle of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties is "the same supersensible" as both the supersensible substrate of nature in general and the supersensible "as principle of the ends of freedom" (§57,346). The sense of the claim that the three ideas of the

supersensible are ideas of the “same” supersensible is obscure. One thing Kant could mean here is that the three ideas “determine” the same supersensible realm from three different points of view, thereby allowing us to join the distinct realms of the concept of nature and the concept of freedom by way of the concept of the purposiveness of nature. If so, then this would appear to be Kant’s solution to the systematic aspect of the gulf between freedom and nature.

But we do not need to concern ourselves with interpreting Kant’s claim about the unity of the three ideas of the supersensible here, since what we are after is an explanation of what Kant means in the first place when he claims that judgments of taste are based on an indeterminate idea of the supersensible. I have argued that one way all judgments of taste are based on the supersensible is that they are based on the idea of the purposiveness of nature; an idea which, for Kant, is an idea of the supersensible. But this is only part of what Kant says about the relation of taste to the supersensible in the resolution to the antinomy. In what follows I attempt to fill in the details of the various senses in which, for Kant, judgments of taste are based on an idea of the supersensible. My main goal in doing this is to highlight a connection Kant draws between the subjective universality of judgments of taste and the supersensible.

For Kant, moral ideas naturally accompany judgments of taste due to an analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment. Since Kant was only able to resolve the antinomy of taste by claiming that judgments of taste refer to the idea of the supersensible, his section on beauty as the symbol of morality can be read as an elaboration of his resolution of that antinomy. More specifically, Kant’s account of beauty as the symbol of morality

helps to clarify Kant's claim in the resolution to the antinomy of taste that judgments of taste refer to the idea of the supersensible.

Kant bases the antinomy of taste on a conflict about the ultimate justification of judgments of taste. For Kant, the question is whether judgments of taste are wholly subjective or possess some kind of objectivity. This, for Kant, amounts to the question of whether judgments of taste are based on a concept of the beautiful. Thus Kant offers the following formulation of the antinomy of taste. "1. *Thesis*. The judgment of taste is not based on concepts; for, if it were, it would be open to dispute (decision by means of proofs). 2. *Antithesis*. The judgment of taste is based on concepts; for otherwise, despite diversity of judgment, there could be no room even for contention in the matter (a claim to the necessary agreement of others with this judgment)" (§56,339).

Kant claims that the antinomy of taste can be resolved by showing that the concept referred to in a judgment of taste, and there must be such a concept if we are to countenance anything beyond merely empirical taste, is an "...intrinsically undetermined and indeterminable one" (§57,339). More specifically, Kant claims that judgments of taste are based on the indeterminable concept "...of a general basis of nature's subjective purposiveness for our power of judgment..." (§57,34). Further, Kant now equates the concept of a basis for nature's purposiveness, a concept which he discussed extensively in the introduction to the third *Critique*, with the concept of the supersensible substrate of appearances.

Kant thinks he can resolve the antinomy of taste by pointing out that the concept to which judgments of taste refer is an "indeterminate and indeterminable" one. Kant's basic point here is that even though judgments of taste must be based on a concept to

ground their “necessary validity,” this does not entail that judgments of taste are “provable from a concept” (§57,339). That is, the concept in question is not a determinable concept of an object’s beauty that we apply to given appearances when we judge an object to be beautiful.

Kant holds that there are also “intrinsically undetermined and indeterminable” concepts (§57,339). When Kant refers to indeterminable concepts here he means concepts of reason, or ideas, as he makes clear in “Remark I” to §57. In the third *Critique* Kant countenances two kinds of ideas; aesthetic ideas, which are representations of the imagination for which no concept is adequate, and rational ideas, which “...can never become a cognition because it involves a *concept* (of the supersensible), for which a commensurate intuition can never be given” (§57, Remark I, 342).

Kant’s solution to the antinomy can be made clearer if we consider the two “commonplaces” of taste with which he opened his discussion of the dialectic of taste. These were, first, that there is no disputing about taste because taste is merely a matter of one’s private likes and dislikes, and, second, that it is rational to work towards agreement in matters of taste even while recognizing that disputes about beauty can never be put to rest by means of a proof that one side or the other in a dispute is right.⁷⁷

The first commonplace amounts to the claim that judgments of taste are not based on concepts. If they were, there would be a universally valid rule to which we could appeal to settle disputes about taste. In that case, the judgment in question would not be a

⁷⁷ Kant also countenances an intermediary position between the two main positions he discusses. According to the intermediary position “there may be contention about taste but not dispute” (§56,338). But since Kant actually builds this position into the second commonplace by making the latter focus on the impossibility of “proofs,” but not of contention, I have reconstructed Kant’s position slightly for ease of presentation by construing the second commonplace as the view that we may rightfully argue (contend) over

judgment of taste at all because judgments of taste are paradigmatically judgments about one's pleasure or displeasure in something. That is, it is a necessary condition of a judgment of taste that it involves the claim that something is immediately pleasing.

The second commonplace, which insists that it is rational to argue about matters of taste, seems to imply the opposite of what is entailed by the first. According to the second position, there must be some concept underlying judgments of taste even if that concept is not one which could provide us with a proof that a given object is beautiful.

Kant resolves the antinomy by showing that since the concept underlying judgments of taste is an idea, the term "concept" is not taken in the same sense in the thesis and the antithesis. So it is true that judgments of taste are not based on a concept, if what is meant by "concept" is a determinate concept of beauty. Instead, judgments of taste are based on an indeterminate and indeterminable concept, or idea. Thus it is also true, as the second commonplace expresses, that judgments of taste must be based on a concept in order to make contention regarding conflicting judgments of taste possible.

But in what way are judgments of taste, as Kant now claims based on the idea of the supersensible substrate of appearances? Is this, as Guyer has claimed, just a needless plunge into metaphysics at a late stage in the development of Kant's aesthetic theory?⁷⁸ On the contrary, I think Kant has been preparing us for this move all along. As early as §6, which forms part of Kant's discussion of the universality of judgments of taste in the

whether something is beautiful, but such arguments do not constitute a dispute (an argument that can be settled through proofs).

⁷⁸ Guyer argues in *Kant and the Claims of Taste* that the Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment represents a "flight into metaphysics" that is a "misguided addition to his aesthetic theory" (Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Second Edition, 294). Guyer appears to have reconsidered his view, however, because he now judges that the Dialectic proposes an "additional level of meaning, parallel and preparatory for a similar line of thought Kant will introduce in the "Critique of Teleological Judgment" (Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, "Forward to the Second edition," xx).

Second Moment, Kant argues that whenever someone is “conscious that his delight in an object is with him independent of interest, it is inevitable that he should look on the object as one containing a ground of delight for all men” (§6, 211). By this Kant means, I think, that since the judging subject is aware that her response to a particular object is not based on any interest, she is naturally led to regard the delight that accompanies her judgment as one the grounds of which are perfectly general. Kant’s resolution to the antinomy of taste in the Dialectic adds a dimension to his earlier account of the universality of judgments of taste. More specifically, Kant now claims that to conceive of a judgment of taste as universal is to base that judgment on an idea of the supersensible.

As Donald Crawford observes, Kant holds that our very capacity to issue judgments of taste leads us to the thought of the supersensible. To see how this can be so, we need to consider more carefully Kant’s views concerning the universality of judgments of taste. Kant claims that part of what we are aware of when we make a judgment of taste is that our judgment is based solely on grounds that can be assumed the same for everyone. More specifically, when we judge something to be beautiful we judge the pleasure we take in the beautiful object to be universally communicable on the basis that it depends solely upon the free play of the cognitive faculties in the apprehension of the mere form of the object. That is, we are in such cases conscious that we are attempting to judge disinterestedly regarding the beauty of a given object.

Now, as Crawford points out, another way Kant puts this is to say that judgments of taste involve the application of a subjective principle that instructs us to judge of beauty in such a way that our judgment is based solely on the harmonious free play of the

faculties.⁷⁹ Crawford argues that this subjective principle of taste is identical to what Kant calls the principle of common sense in §40. Further, according to Crawford, Kant claims that common sense, which he also calls “public sense,” is an idea. More specifically, it is the idea of the “collective reason of mankind” (§40,294). The principle, or maxim, of common sense instructs us to “always judge from the point of view of every one else” (§40,294). According to Crawford’s reading of Kant, the principle of common sense is a general principle of judgment. In the case of judgments of taste, the way to apply it is to try to make sure that your judgment of taste is based solely on the harmonious free play of the cognitive faculties in the mere apprehension of the form of the object. If you succeed then the applicability of your judgment is insured, and you will have successfully put yourself in the place of everyone else in making the judgment.

Crawford argues that Kant’s subjective principle of taste, which is a specific case of the more general maxim of common sense, involves the thought of the supersensible in two ways. First, the idea of common sense invokes the supersensible simply because it is an idea. All ideas, for Kant, refer to the supersensible because they refer to that which cannot be presented in intuition. Ideas are, as Crawford puts it, “not empirically knowable and hence, by definition, supersensible.”⁸⁰ Second, the idea of common sense refers to the supersensible in that “...it is an idea of a supersensible faculty of awareness of judgment.”⁸¹

What Crawford is pointing out here is that, for Kant, since judgments of taste and moral judgments both crucially involve our capacity to make autonomous judgments, and

⁷⁹ Crawford, *Kant’s Aesthetic Theory*, 140.

⁸⁰ Crawford, *Kant’s Aesthetic Theory*, 133.

⁸¹ Crawford, *Kant’s Aesthetic Theory*, 140.

the capacity to issue moral judgments is supersensible in origin, the idea of a common sense refers to the same supersensible faculty that, according to Kant's moral philosophy, underlies moral judgments. And if all judgments of taste involve a specific application of the principle of common sense, such judgments can rightly be said to refer to the supersensible. Put more intuitively the point is that both aesthetic and moral judgments involve the application of a principle that instructs us to judge autonomously.

There is, as Kant points out in §59, a crucial difference between aesthetic and moral judgment. In the case of moral judgment, the principle applied is an objective principle of freedom. Aesthetic judgments involve the application of a merely subjective principle of judgment. But, as Crawford observes, both kinds of judgment are the result of our capacity for self-legislation; a capacity that, for Kant, must be assumed to have a supersensible basis.

If Crawford is right about the role the principle of common sense plays in judgments of taste, this helps to explain Kant's claim in the resolution to the antinomy of taste that judgments of taste refer to the indeterminate concept of the supersensible substrate of appearances because it shows how, for Kant, the ability to issue judgments of taste rests on the same capacities that allow us to make moral judgments. Additionally, the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment highlighted by Crawford's analysis of Kant also anticipates the latter's argument in §59 that beauty is the symbol of morality.

But I think there is more that needs to be said about Kant's appeal to the idea of the supersensible substrate in his resolution of the antinomy of taste. I find Crawford's explication of these difficult sections of the third *Critique* helpful, but I read Kant on the link between judgments of taste and the idea of the supersensible somewhat differently. I

think it is true, as Crawford argues, that the section on the idea of common sense is crucial for understanding the role that the idea of the supersensible is supposed to play in judgments of taste. And it is also right to highlight the analogy Kant draws between moral and aesthetic judgment; an analogy based in part on the fact that both sorts of judgment are supposed to depend, in the ultimate analysis, on our capacity for making autonomous judgments.

But what Crawford doesn't mention here is the link between Kant's appeal to the idea of the supersensible in 59 and a similar appeal Kant made in §17 in the context of his discussion of the ideal of taste. It is this link that I would like to exploit in the interest of both modifying Crawford's account of the connection between judgments of taste and the supersensible, and preparing the way for my discussion of the role Kant's thesis that beauty is the symbol of morality plays both in the resolution of the antinomy, and in the project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature.

Kant claims in §17 that all judgments of taste are in some way guided by an ideal of taste (§17,232). As I argued in my chapter on the ideal of taste, the ideal is best thought of, not as the representation of a maximally beautiful object, but as a symbolic representation of an ideal judgment of taste. What all judgments of taste aspire to, for Kant, is universal validity. So, as I read him, Kant views the ideal of taste as a symbolic representation of maximal agreement in matters of taste.

Now, Kant also holds that the ideal of human beauty is the only possible candidate for an ideal of taste. So one problem presented by Kant's account of the ideal of taste is that of how the ideal of human beauty is supposed to guide all judgments of taste. It is easier to see how all judgments of taste are guided by the ideal of human beauty, for Kant,

now that we have examined his account of beauty as the symbol of morality. According to that account, we are naturally inclined to regard beauty as an expression of the good. Human beauty is not unique in expressing moral ideas. On Kant's view, we are naturally inclined to regard the beautiful in light of the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment, and even demand the same of others (§59,353).

The ideal of human beauty, though, has a more specific role to play in symbolizing the morally good. The ideal of human beauty, or judgments made according to that ideal, requires of us that we attempt to make judgments from the point of view of everyone else. Thus the ideal of human beauty is able to symbolize the goal of all judgments of taste; universal agreement in matters of taste. The ideal of human beauty, for Kant, is a symbolic representation of the requirement that we take the most "enlarged" point of view possible for us when making judgments of taste.

V. Bridging the Gulf between Freedom and Nature

In previous chapters I have attempted to chart the various connections Kant draws between aesthetic judgment and morality through his discussions of free and dependent beauty, the ideal of the beautiful, the sublime, and the intellectual interest in natural beauty. In all of the above discussions Kant highlights the way in which the faculty of reason, and especially practical reason, gets linked to our other faculties in the appreciation of the beautiful and the sublime. My goal in explicating and interpreting these sections of the third *Critique* has been to elucidate the role of aesthetic judgment in the development of one of Kant's main themes in the *Critique of Judgment*; bridging the

gulf between the needs of practical reason and the laws of nature. I have argued that Kant's solution to the difficulty about freedom and nature is not monolithic, but, instead, consists of a complex account of the activities of aesthetic judgment according to which our reflective powers enable us to view a variety of aesthetic experiences as symbolic of a harmonious relationship between freedom and nature. In his discussion of the ideal of beauty, for example, Kant argues that the beauty of the human form provides us with a symbolic expression of the moral ideas that "govern us inwardly." Similarly, in the experience of the sublime we are led by a failure of the cognitive faculties to comprehend nature's vast magnitude (dynamical sublime), and by reflecting on the power of nature to make short work of even our most cherished projects, to an appreciation of practical reason's superiority to nature. In this way, for Kant, an initial disharmony between the imagination and the understanding gives rise to a harmonious relationship between the ultimate goals of practical reason and our cognitive capacities. Finally, we have seen that Kant holds that in our experience of natural beauty we are inspired by the appearance of subjectively purposive forms in nature to hope for an ultimate harmony between the goals of practical reason and the laws of nature. Natural beauty, by revealing to us the reflective principle of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties, also serves as a point of departure for "profound inquiries" into the origin of purposiveness in nature, inquiries which in the concluding sections of the third *Critique* give rise to one of Kant's most sustained discussions of his ethically based rational theology.

My treatment of Kant's solution to the problem about freedom and nature so far has assumed that Kant held that freedom and nature are "bridged" in a variety of ways by our power of reflective judgment. Consequently, I have not identified any singular

argument in Kant that shows how freedom and nature are to be reconciled by way of the power of judgment. But Kant's discussion in §59 of beauty as the symbol of morality casts a different light on the project of reconciling freedom and nature. There, as we have seen, Kant seems to suggest that the analogy between beauty and morality, first discussed in connection with the moral significance of natural beauty in §42, is the key to understanding how the gulf between nature and freedom can be bridged.

In the concluding section of the published introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* Kant writes, in a paragraph that appears to contain Kant's solution to the problem about freedom and nature, that "Judgments concept of a finality of nature" is a "suitable mediating link connecting the realm of the concept of nature with that of the concept of freedom..." (Introduction IX,197). The concept of the purposiveness of nature is able to perform this bridging function, Kant argues, because the harmonious free play of the cognitive faculties that serves as the basis for pleasure in the beautiful "promotes the sensibility of the mind for moral feeling" (Introduction IX,197).

Unfortunately Kant does not elaborate on this point in the introduction. I will argue that it is not until §59 that Kant fills in the details of this picture of how the realm of the concept of freedom and that of the concept of nature are bridged. Kant's argument in the Introduction, I think, is something like the following. The experience of freedom in judgments of taste resulting from the disinterested free play of the imagination and the understanding, because it is analogous to what occurs in a moral judgment, encourages us to regard what is nature in us (human beings as animals) as purposive for our noumenal selves (human beings as rational). This judgment will involve the faculty of judgment's indeterminate concept of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties in the

following sense: We are led by the analogy between moral and aesthetic judgment to regard the sensible self as the tool of, or purposive for, the noumenal self. So, as I read Kant here, he is arguing that the faculty of judgment is able to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature through its regulative idea of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties, but only because of an analogy (or analogies) we notice between moral and aesthetic judgments.

As Guyer has noted, before we can appreciate Kant's purported solution to the problem about freedom and nature we need to develop a more precise picture of what the problem is supposed to be. According to Guyer, since any problem about the *compatibility* of freedom and nature seems to be solved in the third antinomy of the first *Critique*, and by the second *Critique*'s doctrine of the primacy of practical reason, Kant's real concern in the third *Critique* is to bridge a gulf between *feeling* and freedom.

As I read Kant, a preliminary formulation of the problem might look something like the following: (1) The moral law, or more specifically the highest good as the ultimate goal prescribed by the moral law, is meant to be actualized in nature; but (2) nothing guarantees that nature outside of us will prove hospitable to the ends of practical reason, and, perhaps more importantly, internal nature in the form of our feeling also needs to be brought into harmony with our moral goals. Additionally, as Kant account of the sublime shows, the gulf between freedom and nature is a "felt gulf." That is, even in the face of demonstrations of the compatibility of freedom and nature, we experience anxiety at the possibility that nature will prove inhospitable to freedom.

Kant's "answer" to the problem about freedom and nature, as I have indicated, is summarized in his account of beauty as the symbol of morality. As I read Kant, his

theory that beauty is a symbol of morality is best understood as summing up the complex account of the role of reason in aesthetic appreciation and artistic creation he has been developing throughout the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*.

The experience of the sublime, the contemplation of the free beauties of nature, and the formation of the ideal of taste, can all be viewed, following Kant's Introduction account of how the faculty of judgment bridges the gulf between freedom and nature, as reflections guided by the principle of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties. That principle, which for theoretical reason is the heuristic that allows us to view the contingent empirical laws of nature as a system, leads practical reason to, wherever possible, view the ends of nature and the ends of freedom as in harmony with one another. As a specific application of the principle of purposiveness, then, judgments about natural beauty reflectively regard the ends of nature as at least hospitable to the ends of freedom (in the sublime nature is actually subordinated to freedom). Judgments of the sublime are applications of this principle as well, but they discover conterpurposiveness in nature, and so are of no help in our reflections concerning a possible purposiveness of nature.

But the principle of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties on its own is not sufficient to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature. Without the various symbolic representations of a possible harmony between freedom and nature that aesthetic experience affords us, the principle of the purposiveness of nature could not be applied, even reflectively, in our thoughts about the relationship between freedom and nature. This is because, as Kant suggests in the opening paragraph of §59, even reflective judgment requires intuitions in order, not to "verify the reality of our concepts," as is the

case with determinative judgment, but to supply the imagination with some material for reflection (§59,350). The various ways in which beauty is analogous to morality, then, supply reflective judgment with symbolic intuitions that answer to its idea of a purposive fit between the ends of nature and the ends of morality. In this way, the analogy between beauty and morality provides us with a symbolic representation that allows us to reflectively bridge the realm of the concept of nature and that of the concept of freedom.

As I claimed in my reading of Kant's account of beauty as the symbol of morality, there is no one way in which beauty symbolizes morality. Rather, there are many opportunities afforded us by aesthetic experience to view the beautiful in light of the morally good. Likewise, there is no single solution to the problem of the gulf between freedom and nature. Instead, Kant details many instances in which the analogy between aesthetic and moral judgment, coupled with the regulative idea of the purposiveness of nature, impels us to view nature and freedom as harmonious.

Finally, I think Kant's account of beauty as the symbol of morality serves as a natural transition to the themes of the "Critique of Teleological Judgment." Since one way of formulating the problem of the gulf between freedom and nature is to point out that it is in the interest of practical reason to view nature as conducive to the ends of morality, Kant's solution to the problem is not just that the analogy between beauty and morality enjoins us to view freedom and nature as harmonious, but that we are further led to view nature as purposive for freedom, and, ultimately, to view our freedom as the final end of nature. In this way, §59 links the themes of the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" to those of the "Critique of Teleological Judgment."

In section VI of the introduction Kant had explained that the principle of the purposiveness of nature is a maxim that serves to guide our reflective judgments about nature's empirical laws. This maxim instructs us to view nature as if the variety of particular empirical laws found in it were a systematic unity. That is, the kind of unity that would result if nature's empirical laws formed a system designed by an understanding other than our own for the benefit of our cognitive faculties.

We should note here that Kant stresses the fact that the principle of purposiveness is a heuristic principle only. It is a rule given to the faculty of judgment "for and to itself" (VI,187). No conclusions about actual purposes in nature follow from this; Kant's principle of purposiveness is a regulative idea that we employ in order to be able to regard the particular empirical laws of nature as a system.

But, for Kant, the concept of a purposiveness of nature on its own is insufficient to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature. Rather, as we have seen, Kant appears to think that it is the fact that there is a kinship between aesthetic judgment and moral feeling that allows the concept of nature's purposiveness to become "...a suitable mediating link connecting the realm of the concept of nature with that of the concept of freedom" (IX, 197).

We can now begin to see what Kant means when he claims in the introduction that the "spontaneity in the play of the cognitive faculties" characteristic of judgments of taste, precisely because it makes the mind susceptible to moral feeling, allows judgments principle of purposiveness to mediate between freedom and nature. The problem about freedom and nature that Kant is concerned with here is that, although the compatibility of the realm of the concept of nature and the realm of the concept of freedom is not in

question, nothing guarantees that the final end prescribed by the moral law is actualizable in nature.

Kant claims that it is judgment's concept of the purposiveness of nature that allows us to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature because "...through that concept we cognize the possibility of the final end that can only be actualized in nature and in harmony with its laws" (Introduction, IX,196). What can Kant mean by this? I think that Kant's point here is that in order to think of nature as receptive to the ends of morality we must be able to conceive of it as purposive in a particular way. More specifically, we must be able to form a reflective image of nature as tending to support our moral projects. If we thought of nature as thoroughly mechanistic, the best we could hope for would be that nature contained nothing that rendered the project of morality impossible. But, for Kant, the mere possibility that the final end of morality can be realized in nature is apparently not sufficient to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature. So the principle of the purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties, a regulative principle of reflective judgment, becomes a necessary supplement to the wholly mechanistic conception of nature yielded by theoretical reason.

The importance of Kant's accounts of the ideal of taste, and of beauty as the symbol of morality, for bridging the gulf between freedom and nature, then, is that, taken together, they show us how it is possible for reflective judgment to form symbolic presentations of a harmonious accord between freedom and nature. Though we can have no theoretical knowledge that such a harmony is realizable, our experience of beauty, and especially natural beauty, allows us to entertain a rational hope that nature will prove receptive to the ends of morality.

One difficulty for my interpretation of how beauty is supposed to help bridge the gulf between freedom and nature is that Kant never spells out the solution to the problem in quite the way I have. As I indicated earlier, though, I think it is a mistake to attribute to Kant a singular answer to the question of how the gulf between freedom and nature is to be bridged. What Kant gives us instead is a complex account of the various way in which the power of reflective judgment enables us to think of freedom and nature as harmonious, and thus to bridge the gulf between freedom and nature in reflection. My claim is that the most important way in which the account of beauty as the symbol of morality contributes to the project of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature is that it shows how various kinds of aesthetic experiences yield symbols of freedom and nature in harmony.

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