

Chapter 3

Pure Aesthetic Judging as a Form of Life

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Kant's metaphysical understanding of life presents us with something of a puzzle.¹ On the one hand, the concept itself appears only rarely in the writings published during his lifetime. One might expect to find some application of it in the "Critique of Teleological Judgment"; but there Kant denies not only that we can legitimately attribute life to organisms, but even that we can legitimately attribute an analogue of life to them (§65, 5:374–75).² The reason Kant gives for this denial here and elsewhere—namely, that the very concept of matter is incompatible with the concept of life—indeed might make one suspect that the concept has no role to play in the critical

1. My inspiration for taking up this topic long ago was first Martin Moors and then again later Rudi Makkreel. I would like to dedicate this chapter to both of them with gratitude. I have also gained much from the pioneering work, John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's "Critique of Judgment"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), ch. 15. An earlier treatment of this topic can be found in Courtney D. Fugate, *The Teleology of Reason* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014). Makkreel was perhaps the first to suggest in print that Kant's analysis of judgments of taste may be fundamental to understanding his wider conception of life. See Rudolph A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the "Critique of Judgment"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), ch. 5.

2. Here and in the following, I cite all Kant's writings using the form "volume:page number" of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer/Walter de Gruyter, 1902–).

philosophy at all. On the other hand, when the concept of life does appear in Kant's writings, it does so in the most striking and original of ways, ways that are in part the basis of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's penetrating remark that "with his concept of *internal* purposiveness, Kant has resuscitated the Idea in general and especially the Idea of life."³ If we look to Kant's personal notes and the transcripts of his lectures, we also find a very complex and precise set of views on this topic, a set of views that Kant clearly continued to develop over his long career.

But as it turns out, this initially puzzling duality between Kant's published and unpublished views on the concept of life is a fairly common feature of his entire corpus. As recent research has demonstrated plentifully, what first appear as fresh and spontaneous remarks in the published writings are in fact often the conclusions of decades of analysis and reflection. Usually, the latter reflect both a deep engagement with the views of his predecessors, contemporaries, and critics, and an effort to adapt these views to the radically new context of his own critical philosophy.

In this respect, the concept of life is no different; or so I will argue. Indeed, as I will show in this chapter, Hegel was correct in taking this as a truly exemplary case of Kant's creative adaptation and "resuscitation" of a traditional concept. Much could be said on this topic, but here I will focus in particular on how Kant's attempts to integrate the concept of life into his critical philosophy silently structure his analysis and deduction of pure aesthetic judgments regarding the beautiful. In the first section, I will lay the ground by recalling the basic outlines of the history of the concept of life in the Western metaphysical tradition. In the second, I will turn to Kant's general theory of this concept. In the final section, I will show that when seen from within this wider context, the deduction of pure aesthetic judgments is in essence the deduction of a unique form of human life.

The Problem of Life in the Metaphysical Tradition Prior to Kant

Historically, the philosophical concept of life has always signified the internal activity that is characteristic of some substances. In Plato and neo-Platonism, this inner activity was identified with a process of mediation between an

3. Gottfried Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. Theodore F. Geraets, W. A. S. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 280.

idea and what partakes of or participates in that idea, and thus also between the universal and the particular, the one and the many, the first principle and its effects. But, above all, the Platonic conception of life identified it with self-motion, which it was believed always began from an invisible and indeed intellectual principle, namely, the "soul."⁴ In the Aristotelian tradition, the concept of life continued to serve much the same function. Indeed, in accordance with his desire to bring form and matter into a closer connection, Aristotle expanded the explanatory role of life despite his rejection of the central Platonic conception of self-motion. In his writings, the distinction between different kinds of substances is understood not in terms of the distinct ideas in which they participate, but instead in terms of the distinct forms of internal or natural activity that they exhibit. This gave rise in turn to a hierarchical understanding of the forms of life according to which distinct, more independent, and better kinds of beings were understood to be characterized by distinct, more independent, and better kinds of living activities. In accordance with his usual "*pros hen*"⁵ understanding of metaphysical concepts, this also meant that for Aristotle one such form—namely, that belonging to the unmoved mover—was most perfect and independent and therefore most properly to be called "living."⁶

In the medieval period, this two-fold root of the concept of life was codified and provided a Christian inflection through the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. In *De veritate*, he introduces his own view, stating, "we say that something lives in the proper sense if it has a principle of motion or of any activity whatsoever within it, for the primary reason why things are said to be alive is that they seem to have something within them moving them in some kind of motion."⁷ As we learn further in *Summa theologiae*, the distinguishing feature of living beings is first discovered in examining the "characteristic life of animals." From these it is evident that life begins when they begin to move themselves from within and ceases when they

4. For more on this see Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, eds., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 5 (Basel: Schwabe, 1980), 53–56.

5. The feature of Aristotle's doctrine of being and its relation to his concept of life is presented excellently in Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian "Metaphysics"* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), 107–37, 461–66.

6. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 12.7.1072b.

7. St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, vol. 1, *Questions I–IX*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), 198.

cease to do so.⁸ This motion is not accidental to and externally produced in such beings, but instead is natural and arises from within them. Hence, although all motion of natural bodies bears some similarity to life, they are not said to be living in a proper sense; for their nature is to be at rest and hence their motion, which is always produced from without, is a departure from what is natural to them.⁹

From this it would appear that life is a kind of activity, namely, one that begins from within. But this is incorrect according to Aquinas. Words are applied to things mainly because of their external appearances, but that does not mean that words should be taken to indicate these appearances alone. For example, “body” appears to us as a three-dimensional thing, but to define body as a three-dimensional thing only would be to classify it as a species of quantity.¹⁰ Similarly, although we encounter life through various kinds of activities, by “life” we actually refer to a “substance which of its nature has the power of moving itself or giving itself any kind of impulse to activity.” Thus, life is not an activity, but instead something that belongs preeminently to certain kinds of substances, by virtue of which they are *able* to bring about motion or activity from within. In stating this, Aquinas also underscores the deep connection between the very nature of the substance, and thus the *kind* of substance it is, and the specific activities through which its life becomes apparent. For although all motion has similarity to life, as was stated above, only that which truly originates in the living nature of the substance can be called “living” in a proper sense.

As in many matters, Aquinas also follows Aristotle in outlining a hierarchy within the various possible forms of life. As he explains, the more perfectly it can be seen that a thing acts from itself, “the more perfectly does it possess life.”¹¹ Now action from within can have various determinations, namely, (1) the form by which it is moved, (2) the end for the sake of which it moves, and (3) the carrying out of the activity itself. Plants are of the lowest kind, as both (1) and (2) are fixed by nature for these and it is only (3) that arises from within them. Next are animals, which in addition to (3) are also moved by a form that they themselves acquire through the senses. Still higher are the beings with intellect, for in addition to (1) and

8. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 4, *Knowledge in God* (1a. 14–18), ed. Thomas Gornall (Cambridge, UK: Blackfriars, 1964), 115.

9. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 117.

10. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 119.

11. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 123.

(3), these also act in view of ends, “which they provide for themselves,” and hence they “have a more complete kind of life in that their self-movement is more complete.”

But that is not all; the activities of beings with intellect can also be more or less complete in inverse proportion to the extent to which their principles and ends are provided for them by nature. The human intellect, for instance, is self-moved in that it initiates motions, acts from forms it acquires sensibly, and devises the ends to be pursued in particular actions. However, “by nature” it has certain “first principles, about which it has no choice, and the ultimate end, which it is not free not to will.”¹² Moreover, as human knowledge is impossible without input from the senses, the human mind is in this way also dependent upon something provided from without.¹³ None of these defects, however, are found in God, whose being is identical with his intellect. Hence, according to Aquinas, God moves from his own form toward himself as end and is indeed identical with this end and with what he knows. This activity alone is truly complete in the sense of being entirely from itself and toward itself. And although God’s life cannot be other than it is (i.e., his being is necessary), it is necessary not because any of its determinations are provided from without (as is the case with the human intellect, for instance), but rather because they arise from his own nature entirely. For this reason, although all beings from plants to those with intellect can be said to “live” in a proper sense, only “God has life in the most proper [*maxime proprie*] sense.”¹⁴

Before moving forward, it will be helpful to say something about how the concept of a soul fits into this discussion. Following Aristotle, Aquinas also regards the soul as the substantial principle of life in a natural body. The need for such a principle, he argues, is evident from the fact that natural bodies are only moved by something external to them. Hence, if there is life in a natural body, this must be by virtue of a substance that lives within it. Such a substance is simply called the “soul,” and it, rather than the body, is the *proper subject* of life in beings that possess a body. Beings without bodies, on the other hand, such as angels and God, do not require such a principle to act, but instead act of themselves. Hence, they are not said to have “souls” in a proper sense, although they certainly have

12. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 125.

13. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, book 4, *Salvation*, trans. Charles J. O’Neil (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 81.

14. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 123. See also Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 81.

life. “Soul” is therefore to be understood as a concept that depends on the further concept of a relation; “soul” is what we call the inner principle of activity *insofar as* it acts upon the body.

Turning now to the modern period, it is striking to see just how little philosophical attention was devoted to the concept of life, at least up to Kant’s time. For the most part, we find it relegated to the dustbin of history along with all the other so-called “occult qualities” to which the moderns were often vehemently opposed. On the continent, the sole major figure to deal with it is Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who, however, left behind only the doctrine that all substances are intrinsically living along with some notoriously obscure comments about the need to retain the conception of an entelechy. Closer to Kant’s immediate milieu, Christian Wolff and his followers seem to have had even less to say on the topic than did Leibniz. The only exception that I have been able to locate and who would have been relevant to Kant’s intellectual development is Christian August Crusius, whose treatment of this concept is the most detailed and extensive of any German philosopher of his time.¹⁵

Crusius’s concept of life, which I can treat here only briefly, is remarkable for the way in which it combines the kind of theory found in Aquinas with concerns distinctive to the modern period. “Under life,” he explains, “we understand that capacity of a substance, by virtue of which it can be active in many ways based upon an internal ground.”¹⁶ The main motivation behind this definition is the recognition that, according to early modern physics, material substances do in fact exhibit activity from a relatively internal principle. Their distinguishing characteristic lies instead in that this activity is always determined in a fixed spatial direction, and thus lacks the “capacity” to be active in “many ways.” Ultimately, Crusius sees life then as consisting in the capacity of a substance to be active by means of several fundamentally distinct powers.

This definition, Crusius claims, agrees perfectly with common usage if only we recognize that in the latter it is sometimes employed “properly,” at other times “tropically.” It is applied properly to spirits, since these necessar-

15. I am not here considering the possible influences on Kant’s views on life that come from outside of metaphysics proper, many of which are discussed in Jennifer Mensch, *Kant’s Organicism: Epigenesis and the Development of Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

16. Christian August Crusius, *Entwurf der nothwendigen Vernunft-Wahrheiten* (Leipzig: Gleditschens Buchhandlung, 1766), §§458, 942–43.

ily have at least two fundamental powers, namely, will and understanding, and thus also to embodied spirits, that is, animals. It is applied tropically, however, to bodies, plants, and powers. “When we call an animal living: We say ‘life’ of the entire *Supposito* §24. But we hold only the soul to be the *Subjectum quo* of life, and say that the body becomes enlivened by the soul. . . . As long as the body is enlivened by the soul: Then also life itself is ascribed to the body through a trope *κατά συμπάθειαν*, i.e., *participative*, and through a participation.”¹⁷

Thus, the phrase “life of the body” is not to be taken literally when it refers to biological activities such as the beating of the heart. These would be better described as “indications of the enlivened body.” The use of the term in respect to plants, however, Crusius regards as entirely figurative or tropical, since these have no souls and the only basis for using the word “life” in respect to them lies in their external similarity to animal bodies. Finally, for Crusius it is clear that a physical power in a state of activity, which in this period was often referred to as a “living power” (*lebendigen Kraft*), can only be called such tropically, and should instead be said not to have “life” (*Leben*), but “liveliness” (*Lebendigkeit*) to avoid confusion.

According to this important precursor of Kant, then, the true *subjectum quo* of life is always the soul or spirit. But what about the activities of souls? Are they not living as well? To explain this final use of the term “life,” Crusius draws on the classical distinction between existing in a first actuality and existing in a second actuality, explaining: “Life can be present either *actu primo*, or *actu secundo*. It is present *actu primo*, if the powers required for life exist in the subject, but presently do not act. But when they also actually act: then life is there *actu secundo*. Thus, life in *actu secundo* consists in the liveliness of the spiritual powers.” As he further remarks, “since the will in a spiritual being is the ruling power,” life is in fact present in *actu secundo* “when any single living activity of the will is present.”¹⁸

Already from this, we can see that Crusius, like Aquinas, is concerned to distinguish different senses of life, arguing that some are proper, while others are figurative. But also like Aquinas, and despite his more modern approach, Crusius embraces his own version of the traditional hierarchy of forms of life, taken in a proper sense, based upon the degree or perfection of this activity. Crusius’s hierarchy, however, is much more complex and in fact runs along three distinct axes. The life of a being can be of a higher

17. Crusius, *Vernunft-Wahrheiten*, §§458, 945.

18. Crusius, *Vernunft-Wahrheiten*, §§460, 949–50.

or lower kind, and this kind in turn can be developed such that its life is increased or diminished with respect to both the number of its powers and the perfection of these powers. In terms of kind, living beings range all the way from those that are “merely passive” in the sense that no living activity (*actu secundo*) is present in them unless they are stimulated by sensations, to those that are self-active, in which case they can enliven themselves without this.¹⁹ Human beings, Crusius maintains, are of the latter kind. In terms of magnitude, or the number of powers, a living being is capable of activating and developing its powers such that it can exercise more powers at a time. Finally, in terms of perfection, the powers can increase in strength, become better internally connected, and can be developed so that the less noble powers and drives are subject to those that are more noble, such as conscience. The key to developing the last two, that is, the number and perfection of powers, lies in freedom; for on Crusius’s view, it alone is absolutely spontaneous and thus capable of directing, recruiting, and, as it were, forming the other human powers and drives so that they develop in both magnitude and perfection. In this sense, freedom is the proper and highest ruling principle of life within spirits, although by itself it is not necessarily of the greatest strength or magnitude.

This theory of Crusius is quite original, and certainly goes beyond anything found in Aquinas. Equally original is Crusius’s attempt to provide an extensive taxonomy of the different ways in which the powers of living beings may be internally connected, each of which he associates with a special law that is either entirely spiritual or rather mixed, “*leges pneumaticae vel mixtae*.”²⁰ Such laws can either be empirical, or metaphysical, which latter outline only the possible laws of such beings. The further details of this theory do not presently concern us here, except insofar as they constitute an original and quite advanced theory of how the activities of a living being can operate in connection with one another; for instance, how the enlivening of certain mental faculties can depend upon the life in others, how the development or perfection of one may depend upon another, and how the life of freedom can be exercised to form the entire life of an individual.

Finally, to be noted here is the remarkable fact that Crusius chooses to treat the possibility of the communication of ideas and sentiments, which he takes to be the true essence of language and the basis of society, within this metaphysics of the laws of life. Ideas and sensations, Crusius argues, are

19. Crusius, *Vernunft-Wahrheiten*, §§467, 963–64.

20. Crusius, *Vernunft-Wahrheiten*, §§459, 948.

immaterial activities within the soul and, as such, they cannot be produced passively in us through the laws governing the interactions of material substances. Thus, when we communicate, we do not simply influence the mind of another; we rather cause them to literally come alive in a certain specific way, a way that should correspond to what it means to think a certain idea or to have a certain feeling of the kind that we intend to communicate. Now, like all other activities of living beings, this manner of enlivening must be governed by laws, in this case, those describing how the “power to sense can become combined also with a liveliness of the understanding that in other parts is independent from all movement.”²¹ The laws in question are contingent, and hence empirical, and also “mixed,” meaning they span the gap between the mechanism of the body and the powers of the soul. “If a spirit is to be social,” Crusius explains, “then he must be able to share his thoughts and his state of mind [*Gemüthszustand*] with others, and others with him, through sensations.” But human beings can only communicate through the motions we produce with our bodies. Hence, “the sharing of thoughts must happen through certain motions, which serve as signs of thoughts, namely, in that the matter signified occurs to the other spirit in the sensing of the sign. This is what is essential in language.”²² The laws governing this sharing of life through language constitute a special class, and hence are unique and irreducible to those of any other kind of activity. Thus, for Crusius, the sharing of thoughts and sentiments is a relatively autonomous form of activity, that is to say, a relatively autonomous form of life.

As we will soon see, Kant took a special interest in the complexities of a theory of life, and in this he no doubt drew considerable inspiration from these innovations found in Crusius.

Kant’s Underlying Theory of Life

Since, as a general rule, nothing in Kant’s unauthorized writings should be given more weight than those thoughts he actually selected for publication, it is best to begin with the few such remarks he makes about life. In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, published in 1786, Kant states that “*life* is the faculty of a *substance* to determine itself to act from an *internal principle*, of a *finite substance* to change, and of a *material substance*

21. Crusius, *Vernunft-Wahrheiten*, §§465, 957.

22. Crusius, *Vernunft-Wahrheiten*, §§465, 957–58.

[to determine itself] to motion or rest, as change of its state. Now we know no other internal principle in a substance for changing its state except *desiring*, and no other internal activity at all except *thinking*, together with that which depends upon it, the *feeling* of pleasure and displeasure, and *desire* or willing” (4:544).²³

In the first lines of this passage, Kant endorses—as he does on many occasions—the traditional metaphysical concept of life. But at the same time, he partially follows Crusius in indicating what this definition means for a specifically material substance when we take into account the principle of inertia: Life for such a being must be understood as a faculty to be active in more ways than just according to one spatial direction, and thus to violate that principle and to change its own state spontaneously, whether this be one of motion or rest. However, as Kant further explains, since the principle of inertia is a fundamental presupposition of all natural science, it follows that attributing life to material substance would mean the “death of all natural philosophy” (4:544).²⁴ Thus, “the inertia of matter is, and means, nothing else than its lifelessness, as matter in itself” (4:544). Kant’s endorsement, it turns out, therefore comes with a seemingly devastating caveat; life as such cannot be located in nature regarded as appearance, and to the extent that the concept of soul depends on the ability of an internal principle to affect the body, it too seems to lose all objective reality. That a principle of life cannot be attributed to bodies or matter as such, is indeed one of the permanent and fundamental limitations of his theory.

The purpose of the second part of this passage is less clear unless seen within the context of Kant’s more general theory of meaning. Crusius had already made the claim, based on metaphysical grounds, that a living being must at least possess both intellect and will. Kant reaches the same result here, but by the following argument: the definition of life is that of a capacity for acting from an internal principle. But the only internal principle we can properly *conceive of* is thinking. Now, acting from an internal principle of thought is precisely *desiring*. Therefore, life, if it is to mean anything at all, must be the concept of a substance with a faculty of desire. Kant thus arrives at the same conclusion as Crusius, but by means of a critical rather than a metaphysical argument and so without any commitment to the existence of such beings.

23. Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, ed. and trans. Michael Friedmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

24. Cf. *Critique of Judgment*, §73, 5:395.

This is the origin of Kant’s real definition of life, which is found in several of his published writings. The *Critique of Practical Reason*, for example, has it that “‘life’ is the faculty of a being to act according to the laws of the faculty of desire” (5:9n).²⁵ This is sometimes referred to as Kant’s “narrow” definition of life.²⁶ However, Kant himself does not generally speak in terms of either a narrow or a broad definition and, if I am correct, then this is really the only definition of life he thinks possible. Moreover, as Kant explains later in the same passage, this must be the *broadest* formulation of such a real definition, since “it is composed only of marks belonging to pure understanding, i.e., categories, which contain nothing empirical.” Essentially the same definition is stated in a variety of ways throughout Kant’s writings and always as if it were the true and only definition.²⁷

Now, similar to what we saw in Aquinas and Crusius, life is here described as a kind of second-order faculty belonging to a substance or a being considered as a whole, a faculty by virtue of which it may have other faculties for specific kinds of activity, and most especially a faculty of desire. So, while the faculty of desire and life are distinct, there is by definition no living being for Kant to which a faculty of desire is not also attributed. For this reason, Kant states in some contexts we can just define a living being as one having a faculty of desire.²⁸

The same generality applied to his definition of life also applies to the definitions of desire and pleasure, which immediately follow the definition of life stated in the second *Critique*: “The *faculty of desire* is a being’s *faculty*

25. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, 133–272 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Here I have changed the translation of *nach* as “in accordance with” to “according to.”

26. See Pluhar’s editorial note in *Critique of Judgment*, §73, 5:394, p. 276n7.

27. I cite (and translate) Kant’s so-called “Reflexionen,” and other texts, according to *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer/Walter de Gruyter, 1902–); here “Metaphysik Mrongovius,” in *Kant’s Vorlesungen*, *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 29, ed. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983), 743–940, 29:894; “Reflexionen zur Anthropologie,” in *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß: Anthropologie*, Bd. 15 of *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1913), 55–654, R574, 15:248; R1034, 15:465; R1050, 15:469; “Reflexionen zur Metaphysik,” in *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß: Metaphysik*, Bd. 17 of *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1926), 227–745, R3855, 17:313–14; “Metaphysik Volckmann,” in *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 287–96, 28:448–49.

28. See, for example, “Metaphysik L₂,” in *Lectures on Metaphysics*, 297–354, 28:587.

to be by means of its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations. Pleasure [*Lust*] is the representation of the agreement of an object or of an action with the subjective conditions of life, i.e., with the faculty of the causality of a representation with respect to the reality of its object (or with respect to the determination of the powers of the subject to action in order to produce the object)" (5:9n).

These definitions are also repeated, in various forms and nearly always with a reference to life, throughout Kant's published and unpublished writings. In other contexts, however, Kant goes much more deeply into his analysis of the latter in particular. In a series of reflections and notes from the late 1770s, for instance, he explains that we cannot actually feel life itself, and so pleasure cannot simply be said to be a feeling of it.²⁹ What we do feel, however, is the *exercise* of life in our actions, and most particularly in the feelings of pleasure or displeasure, which indicate the furtherance or hindrance of this exercise. In the "Metaphysik Mrongovius" transcripts, he is reported to have explained this special connection between life and feeling as follows: "Since pleasure is agreement with the faculty of desire, it is also agreement with life, and displeasure [is] conflict with life" (29:894).³⁰

Now, because of the indirectness of this relation, there is, according to Kant, no simple way to read off, as it were, the meaning of pleasure and displeasure in regard to life itself; for although pleasure and displeasure generally indicate the furtherance or hindrance of life or liveliness in the part being exercised, this exercise may in fact lead to a decrease in the overall faculty for further action, and thus to a decrease of life in the whole, which is something Crusius had already noted.³¹ For the same reason, we must often distinguish our feeling of the furtherance of life or of liveliness

29. "Reflexionen zur Anthropologie," R561, 15:244; R582, 15:251; R586, 15:252–53; R587, 15:253–54; R1487, 15:717–26; "Moralphilosophie Collins," in *Vorlesungen über Moralphilosophie*, Bd. 27 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 237–473, 27:381; "Moral Mrongovius," in *Vorlesungen über Moralphilosophie*, Bd. 27 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 1395–581, 27:1512; "Anthropologie Friedländer," in *Vorlesungen über Anthropologie*, Bd. 25 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 469–728, 25:499; "Anthropologie Mrongovius," in *Vorlesungen über Anthropologie*, 1209–1429, 25:1319.

30. Cf. "Reflexionen zur Anthropologie," R823, 15:367–68.

31. See "Reflexionen zur Anthropologie," R570, 15:247; R580, 15:249–50; "Anthropologie Friedländer," 25:506.

(*actu secundo*) from what furthers life itself as a whole (*actu primo*). This is obvious in the cases of opium or drunkenness, for instance, which provide an initial stimulation and rush of pleasure, just before rendering us insensible.³² And quite generally, Kant points out that we can feel very good while being ignorant of the fact we are in fact near to death (*The Conflict of the Faculties*, 7:100).³³ On the other hand, pain may signal the hindrance of life in some part of our body, but at the same time improve overall health. What this shows is that, although pleasure and pain do indicate the state of life and its promotion or hindrance in some respect, their true significance depends upon how the activities they indicate add to or subtract from the life of the whole.

As we will see in a moment, Kant generalizes this idea far beyond such empirical examples. But to understand how, we must first examine the distinctive hierarchy of the forms of life that he develops in his reflections and notes to replace the ones articulated by his predecessors. Much like them, Kant thinks of life in terms of a hierarchy arranged according to the degree of activity present in each. The first and lowest degree of life is found in animal nature, which at most contains an *analogon rationis*, or an analogy of reason ("Metaphysik Volckmann," 28:450) and an *arbitrium brutum*, or brute faculty of choice. Such life, even in the human body, is essentially "incomplete," without spontaneity, and subject to "external necessitation as in a machine," while its desire is "heteronomous," governed by instinct, and dependent on pleasure for its activation ("Metaphysik Volckmann," 28:251). Furthermore, and very significantly, it is entirely private or restricted to the individual. This form of life departs so far from the traditional meaning that Kant sometimes suggests it should not be referred to as life at all. The highest kind of life, by contrast, is that of spirit, which belongs to free beings with understanding and will, who, by virtue of these, have the ground of their actions more fully within themselves ("Metaphysik L₁," 28:205; "Reflexionen zur Anthropologie," R824, 15:368).³⁴ God, understood as *primus motor*, is the only "original and unconditioned life" and the source of all life, as

32. Immanuel Kant, *Die philosophischen Hauptvorlesungen Immanuel Kants: Nach den neu aufgefundenen Kollegheften des Grafen Heinrich zu Dohna-Wundlacken*, ed. Arnold Kowalewski (Munich: Rösl, 1924), 177.

33. Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, in *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 233–328.

34. Immanuel Kant, "Metaphysik L₁," in *Vorlesungen über Metaphysik und Rationaltheologie*, Bd. 28 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), 167–350.

Aristotle had claimed; “all other life depends upon the determining causes in time” (“Reflexionen zur Metaphysik,” R4786, 17:727–28). Nevertheless, the human being, as a *free* being, partakes of a “spiritual” life as well; for through this property “the chain of determining causes is in every case cut” (“Reflexionen zur Metaphysik,” R3855, 17:313–14). Such life is “complete” (“Reflexionen zur Anthropologie,” R567, 15:246) and highest because it is free (“Anthropologie Friedländer,” 25:560) and possesses “spontaneity in accordance with practical laws, and its nature is not determinable merely organically and physically, but also morally” (“Reflexionen zur Metaphysik,” R5995, 18:418–19).³⁵ Instead of being governed by instinct and by “a foreign and implanted idea,” human beings possess *arbitrium liberum*, or free choice, and direct themselves “autonomously,” that is, “according to their own idea, which can originate from themselves *a priori*, and their causality is freedom.”

Finally, in contrast to animal life, which is private, spiritual life is intrinsically and objectively universal:

The sufficiency of free choice is the complete life. The more it is in agreement with itself, the more is its choice, according to its nature, in agreement with the wills of others, and the more it is a ground of the unification of others’ choice with our own: the more it agrees with the universal principle of life, the less its obstacles also, and the greater the influence on the relations of free choice of others. The free will that at the same time unifies itself with others possesses the greatest life. (“Reflexionen zur Anthropologie,” R567, 15:246)

Freedom is the original life and in its coherence the condition of the agreement of all life; hence, what furthers the feeling of universal life, or the feeling of the furtherance of universal life, produces a pleasure (“Erläuterungen zu A. G. Baumgartens *Initia philosophiae practicae primae*,” 19:6862).³⁶

35. Immanuel Kant, “Reflexionen zur Metaphysik,” in *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß: Metaphysik*, Bd. 18 of *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928), 3–725.

36. Immanuel Kant, “Erläuterungen Kants zu A. G. Baumgartens *Initia philosophiae practicae primae*,” in *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 19, ed. Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1934), 5–91, 19:6862.

In short, “whatever harmonizes with freedom agrees with the whole of life” (“Metaphysik L₁,” 28:251).³⁷ Of course, in saying this, Kant is not indicating that freedom agrees with all life and so even with the liveliness that damages and decreases life in the whole, but instead that what harmonizes with freedom agrees with the highest life, that is, the life that is greatest in terms of magnitude and perfection. This, again, is a view anticipated by Crusius.

In a small essay published in 1796, Kant explicates these two kinds of life, that is, the animal and the spiritual, and their relation insofar as this concerns the human being’s need for philosophy. Here Kant explains that animal life, though it be merely mechanical and not yet practical, still serves to stimulate and drive us towards the development of our capacities. Nevertheless, this life is a constant fluctuation “poised upon a knife-edge,” and as such it requires philosophy as therapy and medicine in order “to preserve the equilibrium which we call health” (“Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy,” 8:414).³⁸ But, beyond this, philosophy investigates reason and ultimately “proves its [i.e., freedom’s] reality and truth in effects that are presentable in experience” (8:416), thereby revealing the “hyperphysical basis of man’s life” (8:417). “This life-principle,” Kant explains, “is not founded on concepts of the *sensible* . . . ; it proceeds initially and at once from an Idea of the *super-sensible*, namely *freedom*, and from the morally categorical imperative.” The philosophy that establishes and teaches this highest principle of life is alone capable of establishing “perpetual peace” and a state of health among rational beings. In a word, life is unity,³⁹ and so the principle of the highest and greatest life, which is established by philosophy, is also the principle of the highest and greatest unity of all rational beings.

Between the animal life, of which the human being partakes as a bodily being, and this spiritual life, of which it partakes as a free and moral being,

37. See also “Anthropologie Friedländer,” 25:560; “Reflexionen zur Anthropologie,” R824, 15:368; R946, 15:419; “Erläuterungen zu Baumgartens *Initia*,” 19:6871, 6870.

38. Immanuel Kant, “Proclamation of the Imminent Conclusion of a Treaty of Perpetual Peace in Philosophy,” in *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, ed. Henry E. Allison and Peter Heath, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 451–60.

39. Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, ed. Eckart Förster, trans. Eckhart Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 21:211; “Anthropologie Friedländer,” 25:561; “Erläuterungen zu Baumgartens *Initia*,” 19:6862.

there is finally the unique “human” life that she partakes of as a member of her species. In his notes, Kant always situates and clarifies this form of life by contrast with the other two, higher and lower, forms of life.⁴⁰ Unlike animal life, human life is not private, but essentially social. This it shares with spiritual life. But unlike spiritual life, human life is associated not with desire, but always with taste and so with sensibility. In terms of its basis, however, human life again distinguishes itself from the animal in that it is not the life of our bodily senses, but rather is “the life of our cognition” itself (“Reflexionen zur Anthropologie,” R806, 15:351–58), and as such is a kind of life shared by all cognitive subjects insofar as they have intuition and understanding. Taste, or the feeling of this life, therefore depends not on the intrinsically private stimulation by sensations, but instead on their formal or intuitive aspect insofar as this harmonizes with the higher cognitive faculties, and with understanding in particular. Furthermore, since spiritual life concerns “the understanding and freedom,” and more generally whatever genuinely stems from an internal principle of spontaneity, “humanity [or human life], consists in that animality is subordinated to the spiritual” (“Reflexionen zur Anthropologie,” R824, 15:368).

Now, as indicated above, all three forms of life are subject to the distinction between what enlivens, and hence pleases, in the part, and what in fact contributes to the life of the whole. For Kant this distinction runs along two axes, one running horizontally within each form, and the other vertically among the forms. Just as physical pleasure may damage physical life as a whole if it is not controlled and kept in balance, a faculty of genius, which Kant identifies with the enlivening principle in fine art, can damage social life if it is not controlled and kept in balance by the faculty of taste. Even in the moral realm, the “state of *health* in the moral life” can be damaged by “an affect, *even one aroused by the thought of what is good*, [which] is a momentary, sparkling phenomenon that leaves one exhausted” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:406; emphasis mine).⁴¹ This is, so to say, the horizontal axis of Kant’s hierarchy.

The vertical axis is built from a comparison of the three forms with one another. In all cases, life is a principle of unity, and what contributes to

40. “Reflexionen zur Anthropologie,” R567, 15:246; R779, 15:341; R806, 15:351–58; R823, 15:367–68; “Reflexionen zur Metaphysik,” R4237, 17:471–72; “Metaphysik L₁,” 28:248.

41. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.)

the fundamental unity of our powers contributes to life itself. But as we have also seen, the unity in the three forms of life is not of the same scope; animal life is limited entirely to the unity of the individual body, while human life extends to the unity of our kind, and moral life extends universally to the unity of all rational life as such. Therefore, in the human being, who partakes of all three forms, the two lower forms of life only truly contribute to life in the highest sense when they are controlled and kept in balance through freedom, and hence in agreement with the unity of our rational nature and so ultimately with the moral law as the principle of that unity.

Now, since he regards feeling as signifying the furtherance or hindrance of life, it is not surprising that we also discover Kant articulating a hierarchy of feeling that strictly parallels the vertical axis above. In one sketch, he writes, for instance: “The lowest feeling is in that which is considered merely in relation to the private sense. More elevated is that which pleases the communal sense (taste). . . . The highest is that which is derived from the unity of the universal satisfaction *a priori*. 1. Sensible feeling. 2. Taste (*sensus communis*). 3. Moral feeling. All three please immediately” (“Reflexionen zur Anthropologie,” R1487, 15:654).

A bit later in the same sketch, we read that “everything that furthers the feeling of life, be it of animal (wellbeing) or human or of spiritual life, pleases.” Another related reflection states, “the feeling of the furtherance or hindrance of life is liking and disliking. . . . But we have an animal, a spiritual and a human life. Through the first, we are capable of gratification and pain (feeling), through the third, of liking through sensible judgment (taste), through the second, of liking through reason” (R823, 15:367–68). In R824 (15:368), Kant explains similarly, “the feeling of life in perception is great, but I feel an even greater life in an enlivening that is voluntary, and I feel the greatest *principium* of life in morality.” Thus, in parallel with the forms of life, the sensible feeling of animal life is private, the moral feeling of spiritual life is objectively universal, and the pure aesthetic feeling or the taste of human life is universal, but both sensible and subjective (“Metaphysik L₁,” 28:248–49). Kant sometimes expresses this idea by describing taste as social feeling or the feeling of human life.⁴² Just after distinguishing the three kinds of life in “Metaphysik L₁,” Kant is reported to have said that “*human pleasure* is feeling according to a universal sense, by means of the sensible power of judgment; it is a middle thing and is cognized from sensibility through the idea” (28:248).

42. *Die Philosophischen Hauptvorlesungen*, 223.

From the above, we can see that Kant developed a highly articulated theory of life over his career, one that should shed light on his analysis of taste. But now we must face a typical Kantian question: With what right do we ascribe objective reality to any of these concepts? Kant's position on animal life is somewhat murky. In some texts he seems to accept it based on an analogy with the life we experience within ourselves. But in the third *Critique*, he seems to deny that animals can be said to be living even by such an analogy (§65, 5:375). As for spiritual life, and the feeling of it, their objective reality is evidently established along with the reality of freedom and the moral incentive in the second *Critique*. As Kant states in one text, "the moral law reveals to me a life independent of animality and even of the whole sensible world" (5:162). But what about human life? It is my central thesis that the application of this concept receives its sole critical foundation in the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," to which I now turn.

Kant's Deduction of Human Life

The theory of life just presented is in fact just a basic sketch of the main contours of Kant's thoughts on this topic; as they occurred to him in various contexts over the course of the critical period. The vast majority of the texts, some of them quite important, have not been analyzed or even mentioned here for want of space; although I am confident that they would not overturn the general points made above.

Nevertheless, it has been shown that when Kant began to write the *Critique of Judgment*, he had long been thinking about the connection between life and feeling. He had even developed a fairly detailed view on how the judgment of taste fits into this larger picture. Already in the early 1770s, he was prepared to state, for instance, that the beautiful "promotes the inner life, since it sets the powers of cognition into activity" ("Anthropologie Collins," 25:181).⁴³ Seen from this point of view, it was clear to Kant that in making a judgment of taste, we not only "postulate" the universality of our aesthetic pleasure, but on a deeper level, we also postulate the existence of a form of life belonging to us not as animals alone, nor as spirits alone, but instead as human beings in which the nexus of the animal and the spiritual (i.e., the moral) is essential and definitive. In taste itself, he states in

43. "Anthropologie Collins," in *Vorlesungen über Anthropologie*, Bd. 25 of *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 7–238.

1790 without further comment or justification, the "presentation is referred only to the subject, namely, to his feeling of life, under the name feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and this forms the basis of a very special power of discriminating and judging" (§1, 5:204). Taste is so "very special," on his view, because it consists in the power to judge whether the pleasure arising from one's own feeling of life is at the same time universally valid for all other human beings, and so also whether this feeling is really one of the furtherance of a specifically shared human form of life.

Seeing taste from the vantage point of the concept of life thus provides us with another way to understand the critical project concerning the former. "The critique of taste," as Kant explains, "is a *science* if it derives the possibility of such judging from the nature of these powers as cognitive powers as such. It is with the latter alone, with a transcendental critique, that we are here concerned throughout. Its aim is to set forth and justify the subjective principle of taste as an a priori principle of the power of judgment" (§34, 5:286). The "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," in other words, seeks to justify the normative claims "postulated" in judgments of taste by justifying the subjective principle that they presuppose. But this subjective principle is nothing but the special form of human life, the furtherance of which is supposedly felt in aesthetic pleasure. Hence, the critique aims to justify this form of human life "as an a priori principle of the power of judgment." But what can this mean? It cannot mean, of course, that Kant wishes to demonstrate the existence of this form of life. If such were even possible, it still would not support the *normative claims* of taste, nor would the proof be "scientific" in the sense of the quotation above. As we will see more fully below, the normative claims contained in judgments of taste, when taken together, amount to the claim that we are able to make judgments that rest entirely on such a form of life. And to justify this *claim*—which in fact concerns the supersensible principle within us, about which knowledge is impossible—Kant believes that he need only to show that we do in fact make it and that making it is consistent with the constitution of our mental faculties and the limitations these impose upon judgment itself.

The "Analytic of the Beautiful": The Four Moments and the Form of Life

As we have just seen, Kant articulates the formal features of human life by comparing it with, and positioning it between, animal and spiritual, or moral, life. Strikingly, the employment of this same method is one of the

most prominent features of the “Analytic of the Beautiful” as explicated in the four moments, which latter articulate the distinct claims made in a judgment of taste insofar as they are reflected in its form. What I propose to do in this subsection is to explain how each of the first three moments corresponds to one of three essential features of the form of human life, so that together they amount to the *claim* that taste rests on an entirely distinctive form of life that is shared among all human beings as such.

In the first moment of the beautiful, Kant distinguishes the pleasure found in a judgment of taste from the pleasure of the agreeable, that is, physical pleasure, and liking of the good, that is, the approval we give to something either as a means or morally. The pleasure of taste is distinct from the former, but like the latter, in that it claims to rest on reflection. On the other hand, it is distinct from the latter, but like the former, in being aesthetic and singular. Yet it differs from both in claiming to be essentially unrelated to any possible interest. With the agreeable, the physical pleasure based upon our bodily constitution comes first and subsequently generates an interest when we reflect upon it. With the good, reflection itself generates an interest, and from this arises a liking, which in the moral case is presented to us as a feeling determined by consciousness of the moral law itself. The pleasure of taste, by contrast, is neither determined by the constitution of something outside of our minds and over which we have no control, nor is it determined by our will, which, although within our control, is not free with respect to what it approves. Thus, although moral life contains a higher degree of spontaneity, indeed the highest, the approval involved in moral life, in respect to us as human beings, is not free at all. The freedom of moral life is only the freedom of the will, *and for this reason*, not the freedom of pleasure or liking. Therefore, as Kant explains, “of all three kinds of liking, only the liking involved in taste for the beautiful is disinterested and *free*” (§5, 5:210). The freedom of this liking *as such* thus already indicates, according to Kant, that it is distinct in kind from both the agreeable and the good, and therefore holds “only for human beings, i.e., beings who are animal and yet rational, although it is not enough that they be rational (e.g., spirits) but they must be animal as well.” Now, freedom, or spontaneity, is one of the essential features of life, as we saw above, and here in the first moment, Kant effectively articulates the claim that the principle of aesthetic judgment is a free and spontaneous, and hence independent, activity. It goes beyond animal life in the degree of its spontaneity, but it differs from spiritual life in the specific form of its freedom.

Kant introduces the second moment of the beautiful by noting that it is implied already in the first as follows. If judgments of taste claim to be free in the sense above, then they claim independence from all external determining factors, and hence from all particular or private ones deriving from the agreeable feeling of animal life. If such a judgment is possible, then it is, at the very least, intrinsically universal for all judging subjects, and the life of which it is a feeling must be a form of life that each human being partakes of equally. But being also intuitive and singular, the judgment of taste cannot be based upon concepts, and so must be distinct from the approval of what is good, which is universal, but ranging over all rational beings as such. This “remarkable” and “strange” feature consists, then, in the claim that each judgment—precisely due to its freedom—exemplifies a *universal rule*, not for judging the features of objects, which would be easy to explain, but rather for the aesthetic judgments of all other human beings. Kant describes the claim to such “subjective universality” as equivalent to the belief that one has a kind of “universal voice,” which is “only an idea,” albeit one that enables us to speak for others in a way that “requires . . . agreement from everyone, as an instance of the rule” (§8, 5:216). From this, we can see that the second moment of the beautiful goes beyond the first by introducing *the concept or idea of a higher rule* of which each genuine judgment of taste is thought to be but an instance or example. Moreover, this higher rule governs only the judging of subjects in the absence of anything else that would determine such judgment, whether this be something bodily or something purely conceptual.

Now, life as *actu primo* is in all cases a principle of unity that provides an internal rule and measure of all its own activities *actu secundo*. This is already implied in Kant’s definition of life in terms of a being having causality based upon representations. The unity and structure of the representation in such a being provides the normative form or exemplary model for the products brought about through its life’s activities. Taste, as we have just seen, also attests to just such a rule or principle for evaluating the expressions of human life: the rule underlying it is thought as the exemplary model providing the standard for such evaluation.

But what precisely is the matter of this form of life? If such is not the body and not the will itself, then what exactly is the form of life the life of? Kant answers this question at the end of the second moment through a comparison with the other two forms of life. Taste cannot have its principle in the physical constitution of our senses, and hence in animal

life, or else it would be private. Only cognition is truly universal. But taste cannot consist in cognition either, and so cannot be a feeling attesting to our spiritual life. The only remaining possibility—Kant concludes—is that taste contains a feeling of the life of the indeterminate subjective basis making possible cognition *in general*. Now, in all *human* beings, but not necessarily in all *rational* beings, this subjective basis consists in the unity or harmony between the imagination's faculty for apprehending sensible intuition and the understanding's faculty for unifying this in turn under a concept. Furthermore, since this harmony also must not be restricted to any determinate cognition, it must be a free or indeterminate harmony of these two faculties in general insofar as they are conditions of cognition. If my interpretation is correct, then Kant refers taste to human life precisely because the matter of its activity can only be the two faculties of cognition found in all human beings as such, but not necessarily all rational beings, namely, imagination and understanding.⁴⁴ And it is the furtherance of this same life that he then makes reference to when he speaks of the mutual enlivening of these mental faculties in their free play (§21, 5:238–39).⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, Kant here traces the *form* of judgments of taste, namely, their free lawfulness, which itself is analogous to the form of life, back to the concept of an actual principle of life standing at the basis of such judgments.

Kant introduces the third moment by defining purposiveness in its most general form as “the object of a concept insofar as we regard this concept as the object's cause (the real basis of its possibility); and the causality that a *concept* has with regard to its *object* is purposiveness (*forma finalis*)” (§10, 5:220). The connection of this to Kant's definition of life is patent; a living being *actu primo* is one capable of having purposes, and the form of its causality, that is, of its life *actu secundo*, is purposiveness. As we should expect by now, Kant identifies the special purposiveness underlying taste by distinguishing it from the forms deriving from purposes based on animal life and on spiritual or moral life. These last two forms of purposiveness involve determinate purposes. Taste, however, as it cannot be based on nor give rise to a purpose, can only consist in a purposiveness that is indeterminate or

44. Whether on Kant's view this claim applies to both imagination and understanding, or rather only to the former of this pair, is a difficult matter to decide.

45. An important discussion of the development of Kant's views on this matter is found in Paul Guyer, “Kant's Aesthetics in his *Lectures on Metaphysics*,” in Kant's “*Lectures on Metaphysics*”: A Critical Guide, ed. Courtney D. Fugate (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 156–78.

without purpose. Notably, Kant never in fact explains why we must attribute purposiveness to taste. Presumably, the reason is that taste claims to be a spontaneity according to a rule or idea, and hence to be based upon a causality of the mental powers exhibiting some kind of lawfulness in their free activity, and this alone implies an indeterminate form of purposiveness. In any case, life in general is a causal principle of unity, and taste, Kant here declares, “does have causality in it, namely, to keep [us in] the state of [having] the presentation itself, and [to keep] the cognitive powers engaged [in their occupation] without any further aim” (§12, 5:222). The purposiveness of taste, which is the form of the enlivened activity of the mental powers, is thus peculiar in that it aims at nothing but the continuation and reproduction of its own intrinsic form of causality.

As we saw from the second moment, taste claims to rest on a spontaneous or free rule or idea. Now, from the third, we can also see that this rule or idea is not merely the norm for some product created through the act of judgment, like the concept of a shelf in the mind of a carpenter would be for the shelf actually built; rather, it is the idea and norm of judgment's *own* activities. The life that we feel in a judgment of taste aims at nothing beyond itself. Its inner rule or criteria is only the promotion of its own free activity. Therefore, whatever form of life taste may exemplify, the rule or norm in question is nothing other than the internal measure for judging all other activities of judgment as instances of that very same life. Like all forms of life, taste is self-regulating and self-formative.

Kant's Deduction of the Form of Human Life as the Principle of Taste

Judgments of taste not only make claims, they make claims a priori. And for this reason, Kant believes, they require a deduction. But not all the claims of taste require justification. There is no need, for instance, to justify their status as singular and aesthetic, any more than it is necessary to justify the pleasure we take in the agreeable, that is, in our feeling mere animal life, since the last makes no claims on the judgment of *anyone else*. What requires a deduction, according to Kant, is specifically “*the universal validity of this pleasure*,” that it is “valid for everyone” (§37, 5:289).

Kant's very brief solution to this problem rests on two fundamental ideas, both of which were adumbrated already in the second moment of the beautiful. The first is that the deduction really only needs to show that *if*

there are such judgments, then these must be valid for everyone. He doesn't presume to show there actually are such judgments. This is where the second fundamental idea comes in: among the essential claims of taste is the claim that it takes into account nothing but the sensible form of the object, and as such can be based only upon the same mental faculties we presuppose in all other *human* beings (not all animals, not all rational beings). If there are judgments of taste, and if there is a feeling of life that accompanies them—that is, if the claims made in such judging truly obtain—*then* that feeling can only be a feeling of a life that is present equally in all human beings *as such*. This pleasure is neither restricted to private conditions, nor is it determined by our higher rational nature, as in the case of moral feeling. It is instead a feeling that belongs specifically to humanity insofar as it is active, responsive and thus alive in the individual, finite cognizer. Taste can therefore be defined as “our ability to judge a priori the communicability of the feelings that (without the mediation of a concept) are connected with a given presentation” (§40, 5:296).

Why does Kant include this seeming repetition of the second moment? And what does it add to his theory of human life? The point is one about deduction or justification. The second moment shows that judgments of taste make a claim to universality and what motivates this claim. The present deduction, however, explains that—due to the special character of taste itself—the basis upon which we claim universality is at the same time sufficient to *justify* this claim. Why? Because taste makes its claims only on other judgments of taste made by other subjects, subjects who *claim* to have the very same basis for making the reciprocal demand on our own judgments of taste. In other words, we share this form of life by mutual participation in a normative practice that is intrinsically self-regulating and autonomous. “Taste,” Kant states in another context, “lays claim merely to autonomy” (§32, 5:283), “where it is, subjectively, object to itself as well as law to itself” (§36, 5:288). The feature or norm of human life exhibited in taste, in other words, is nothing but the inner characteristic form of the faculty of judgment's own free activity and, as such, it requires no further or external justification for making its claims upon itself.

Human Life as the Solution to the “Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment”

As Kant makes clear, the dialectic of taste is not like the dialectics in either of the other two *Critiques*. Since taste does not concern concepts and does

not make conceptual claims, it cannot give rise to a dialectic directly. However, indirectly, in the act of transcendental reflection upon the possibility of judgments of taste, there nevertheless arises “a dialectic of the critique of taste (rather than of taste itself) concerning the *principles* of this critique” (§55, 5:337). That is to say, in this act of transcendental reflection, “conflicting concepts arise naturally and inevitably.”

This is a remarkable claim for several reasons. First, it shows that transcendental reflection in this case is actually *an original source of concepts* regarding the principles of taste. In other words, these concepts arise only from within this reflection, and would not have been discoverable from any other source. As Kant states elsewhere, the analysis of taste reveals “to him [i.e., the transcendental philosopher] a property of our cognitive power which without this analysis would have remained unknown” (§7, 5:213). Second, it claims that these concepts arise “naturally and necessarily” in the course of our reflections on taste itself and upon its principles. We are forced, so it seems, to adopt different “points of view in judging” (§57, 5:339), which, only when conceptualized by the transcendental philosopher, produce an unavoidable antinomy.

The fact that this critique is itself an original source of concepts for us has a parallel, if at all, only in the dialectic of the first *Critique*, where the speculative antinomies force us to introduce the concept of things considered as noumena. However, in that case, the antinomy that arises is between presumably objective principles for cognizing objects, and it is a difficulty for common human reason, not for the transcendental philosopher. By contrast, in the dialectic of taste, as Kant informs us, the situation is reversed; the antinomy arises only for the transcendental philosopher, and not at all for the common practitioner of taste who judges without concepts. Hence, in this case alone does transcendental philosophy first disclose cognition of a dimension of human nature.

The antinomy faced by the transcendental philosopher is this: (thesis) taste is not based on concepts, for otherwise it would not be singular and aesthetic, and one could demonstrate the truth or falsity of an aesthetic judgment (which cannot be done); (antithesis) taste is based on concepts, for otherwise it could not be universal and necessary, and we could not demand others judge as we do (§57, 5:339). From this we can see three things. First, the thesis and antithesis here result from nothing more than a particular way of combining the claims made by taste into two opposing statements, which Kant sometimes refers to as taste's claims and counter-claims. Second, none of the moments of taste, which explicate the claims made by one who presumes to make a judgment of taste, actually consist

in the claim that taste is or is not based on concepts. Rather, it is the transcendental philosopher who first introduces the idea that taste is or is not based upon a concept; and she does this precisely in order to make sense of the claims of taste by investigating the possibility of their principle. Third, in view of the question of life, we can see that the two opposing statements have a very special significance. The thesis amounts to the claim that the principle of taste is animal life (§57, 5:339), while the antithesis amounts to the claim that it is spiritual or moral life. Together, these claims thus seem to conflict and to cancel one another out, thereby undermining the coherence, and thus the validity, of *any* principle of taste, and so also of all the claims made by taste in the four moments.

According to Kant, in order to “save its claim” in each case (§57, 5:340), we must here introduce an entirely new notion, namely, one of an indeterminate concept of a supersensible basis for judgment that lies within every human subject. Only such an indeterminate concept of the “supersensible substrate of humanity,” he asserts, allows us to *positively* resolve all of judgment’s claims by reference to a single principle. The antinomy discovered in the course of this critique thus compels “us against our will to look beyond the sensible to the supersensible as the point [where] all our a priori powers are reconciled, since that is the only alternative left for bringing reason into harmony with itself” (§57, 5:341).

In summary, the form that taste claims for itself, as explicated in the four moments, results in a demand being placed on the transcendental philosopher to admit the idea of an ultimate subjective basis of all cognitive activities in human beings, that is, a shared principle and form of cognitive life that is uniquely human. As we have seen, the legitimacy of this concept is established by Kant neither empirically, nor metaphysically, but instead *critically* through the science of the beautiful, which is nothing other than the transcendental critique of the aesthetic power of judgment itself. As for the idea of this special form of life “as the sole key for solving the mystery of this ability [i.e., taste] concealed from us even as to its sources, we can do no more than to point to it; but there is nothing we can do that would allow us to grasp it any further” (§57, 5:341).

Chapter 4

The Aesthetic Perfection of Life in Baumgarten, Meier, and Kant

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Some readers might associate the phrase “the aesthetic perfection of life” in the title of this chapter with Nietzsche’s appeal to the “great and rare art” of “giving style to one’s character” in *The Gay Science*, with Michel Foucault’s injunction to “create ourselves as a work of art,” or with related discussions of philosophy as a “way of life” and “art of living” in works by Pierre Hadot and Alexander Nehamas.¹ These associations are only natural, given the ambiguities of the term “aesthetics,” its proximity to “the philosophy of art,” and the way that “lifestyle” has become such a pressing contemporary concern—not least among philosophers.

In fact, the phrase, as it is used in the title of this chapter, refers to an older way of thinking about the role that the concept of “life” plays in aesthetics, one that emerged in German philosophy in the middle of the eighteenth century. It was during this time that aesthetics was introduced as a new part of philosophy by Alexander Baumgarten. Baumgarten did not

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), §290; Michel Foucault, *Essential Works, 1954–1984*, vol. 1, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 262; Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold Davidson (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995); Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).