

Review of Patricia M. Matthews. *The Significance of Beauty. Kant on Feeling and the System of the Mind*. Dordrecht; Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997. In Philosophy in Review (Canada), 19(2) (April) (1999) 129-130

PATRICIA M. MATTHEWS The Significance of Beauty: Kant on Feeling and the System of the Mind. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1997. Pp. ix + 239.

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Matthews explores the possible ways in which the judgment of taste might act as a mediating link between theoretical and practical reason in Kant's system of the mind. In doing so, she illuminates our understanding of Kant's account of beauty in interesting ways. In the introduction Matthews writes, 'Beauty need not lead to knowledge or moral activity in order to have value in our lives' (p.1). The aim of this book, however, is to show that the feeling of beauty does serve a larger purpose for Kant. The relevant feature of the experience of beauty is its 'ability to orient rational beings in a sensible world'. Matthews' book is dedicated to explaining how the experience of beauty does this.

Matthews sets out what can be understood to be the features of an experience of beauty according to the 'Analytic of the Beautiful', and the 'Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments' in chapter one. In the following two chapters she focusses on the two salient features of Kant's account of beauty: first, that it involves an engagement with perceptual form, the nature of which is underpinned by the principle of purposiveness; and secondly, that this engagement with perceptual form gives rise to an awareness of the manifold of intuitions. In chapter two she discusses the manifold of intuitions which accompany the state of mind produced in the experience of beauty not in relation to art or genius, but in relation to revolutionary ways of thinking (71). She concentrates on the state of mind produced by the experience of natural beauty rather than artistic beauty. If we experience the beauty of

nature, then at the same time we experience the aspects of the presentation that go beyond what can be comprehended in a given concept. Matthews speculates that 'part of making connections in science may involve considering aspects of the object that might have been ignored in our original conception of it' (71). It is through logical judgment that we make connections between objects, but it is through reflective aesthetic judgment that 'imagination opens us up to the possibility of complex interconnections in nature' (71). According to Matthews: 'In addition to exhibiting the idea of purposiveness for judgment and confirming its possibility, our feeling for beauty might offer us an initial sense of where to seek order in the world. ... Our feeling for order in appreciating beauty may give us an initial sense for the objects in the world that are worth initially pursuing in order to get our bearings. Kant speaks ... of the principle of purposiveness as one that orients us in nature's diversity, and appreciating the beauty of nature may be the first step in this orientation' (72-73). The possibility of discovery in science might be dependent on us having experienced the beauty of nature (72-3).

In chapter three, Matthews discusses Kant's idea of our supersensible nature as the foundation of common sense which in turn is the foundation of our ability to judge from an enlarged, rational perspective (108); that is, from the point of view of everyone else (a disinterested perspective). A judgment of beauty, though disinterested, is pleasurable because we feel what seems like a fit (a harmony) between the categories of the understanding and what seems like the structure of the world (but which is in fact the form of the imagination's presentation of the world). She explains that our sensible natures make us self-interested but that a judgment of beauty prepares us to judge from a disinterested standpoint, an enlarged perspective. As Matthews interprets Kant in section 42 of the third critique, the felt harmony between nature and our cognitive faculties in a judgment of taste, 'gives us a hint that nature might also harmonize with our moral ends' (161).

In chapters four and five, Matthews considers how Kant might achieve a system of the mind rather than a mere aggregate. For the powers of the mind to form a system they need to

be grounded by the one a priori principle. Matthews herself acknowledges that while Kant claims to have achieved a system of the mind, it is not certain that he in fact does so. Matthews simply considers the possible ways that such a unity of mind might be achieved in Kant's work, with a particular interest in the significance of beauty for this task. This interest informs her reading of Kant's aesthetic theory, prompting her to interpret some aspects of it in new ways. For example, in opposition to those commentators who view the antinomy in the 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment' as superfluous, Matthews argues in chapter four, that the 'Deduction of Judgments of Taste' establishes the first condition of a judgment of taste which is the harmony of the faculties (that allows for the possibility of a feeling that is universally communicable), while in the antinomy he establishes the second condition which is that the judgment of taste is based on that universally communicable feeling, 'rather than on some other feeling' (135). Given that it is the feeling of beauty which is crucial to the transition, Matthews argues that the antinomy is 'part of Kant's evidence for showing that the powers of the mind form a system, that theoretical and practical reason have a common source' (136).

Matthews herself has a larger purpose in exploring beauty's role in the transition between cognition and desire in Kant's philosophy; and that is, to explore the idea that the experience of beauty plays a more crucial and interesting role in our lives than many contemporary understandings of beauty would allow. While this book will interest philosophers with a historical interest in Kant, it will also interest aestheticians with an interest in cognitive theories of beauty and anyone, for that matter, who is seriously interested in understanding the nature of beauty.

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