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The Classical Trinity and Kant's Aesthetic Formalism

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Abstract: I identify two mutually exclusive notions of formalism in Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*: a thin concept of aesthetic formalism and a thick concept of aesthetic formalism. Arguably there is textual support for both concepts in Kant's third critique. I offer interpretations of three key elements in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* which support a thick formalism. The three key elements are: Harmony of the Faculties, Aesthetic Ideas and *Sensus Communis*. I interpret these concepts in relation to the conditions for theoretical Reason, the conditions for moral motivation and the conditions for intersubjectivity, respectively. I conclude that there is no support for a thin concept of aesthetic formalism when the key elements of Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* are understood in the context of his broader critical aims.

Keywords: Kant's aesthetic formalism, Harmony of the Faculties, Aesthetic Ideas, *Sensus Communis*, moral motivation, intersubjectivity.

There are sixty sections in Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*. The first twenty-two sections subtitled "The Analytic of the Beautiful" identify the features of aesthetic judgement which in total seem to form a set of dichotomies: objective – subjective; universal – autonomous; cognitive – noncognitive; conceptual – non-conceptual. In the remaining parts of the Critique, Kant grounds the features identified in the Analytic of the Beautiful in such a way that the apparent dichotomies can now be understood as complementaries. In this latter part of the Critique, Kant's theoretical concerns are to the fore. As such, this latter part of the Critique needs to be understood in the light of his first two critiques.

A short hand way to understand the relevance of the first two critiques for his aesthetic theory is to bear in mind that Kant treats the aspects of mind revealed by aesthetic judgement as providing the missing link for the possibility of free will. Since the Enlightenment, nature had been construed as determined by laws and human beings as physically determined. Kant rejected the consequences for epistemology and ethics of such a view and aimed to replace this view with one whereby agency and free will were possible. Kant dismissed compatibilism as a subterfuge yet we might understand Kant as providing the grounds for some form of compatibilism nonetheless.[1]

In the first two critiques, Kant gives an account of theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. Theoretical knowledge provides us with knowledge of the empirical world. Practical knowledge provides us with reasons for action. Theoretical knowledge is driven by our needs and interests as physical creatures or sensuous creatures in a physical world. It is driven by natural necessity even though what we can know of the world is determined in part by the categories and concepts we hold. Practical knowledge in contrast originates in an aspect of ourselves that is free of the determinism of nature. Its causality is grounded in freedom and "spontaneity". Kant draws upon a notion of the supersensible substrate of humanity to ultimately ground this aspect of ourselves in the first two critiques, but in the light of his enquiry into the grounds of aesthetic judgement, we can understand this as equivalent to our second natures.

Theoretical knowledge involves the faculties of Imagination and Understanding, which are deployed at the services of natural necessity. In contrast, in aesthetic judgement these faculties are redeployed to express an aspect of our freedom from determinism. Practical knowledge involves Reason and the ideas of Reason, called rational ideas or the pure concepts of Reason by Kant. These ideas do not provide us with knowledge of the empirical world but are regulative and grounded in our freedom. In contrast, in aesthetic Judgement, rational ideas are experienced through a personal lens and result in the impression that the beautiful object is expressive of the personal associations evoked by rational ideas. In this form they

1. I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, M. Gregor (ed. and trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5:96, 81.

are called Aesthetic Ideas. Here then, ideas grounded *in our freedom* are experienced as *of the world* and when experienced as such evoke a positive feeling response. The grounds of our freedom get traction in the empirical world. In this way, Kant identifies an analogy to how the concept of the moral law (which he claims is not really a cognition) can be necessarily connected with a non-empirically based feeling.

When Kant's aesthetic theory is understood, as it should be, as an analogy to moral judgement, its formalism and universality are understood as features relevant to this analogy. The analogy suggests that the point of the formalism is to ground aesthetic judgement in freedom from nature's determinism (compatible with the ground of moral judgement) and the universality simply points to the intersubjective constraint on aesthetic and moral judgement. Neither the formalism nor universality of aesthetic judgements are meant to standardize particular aesthetic judgements. Instead, it is *that* we objectify value that is of interest to Kant's broader theoretical aims. In what follows, I present an explanation of what is at stake between what I term thin and thick aesthetic formalisms. I then focus upon the text of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* and interpret it in the light of the conditions for theoretical Reason according to the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the conditions for practical Reason according to the *Critique of Practical Reason* in order to mount a positive account of the senses in which Kant's aesthetic theory presents a thick aesthetic formalism.

I. Thin Aesthetic Formalism

Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* is not only a seminal text in philosophical aesthetics but has been influential in art criticism and art historical analysis. However, the interpretation that has been most influential among philosophers of art, art theorists and art historians ignores the context of Kant's larger aims and apparently focuses on a selection of quotes from the Analytic of the Beautiful (§1-22) in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*. According to the popular notion of Kant's aesthetic theory which results, the composition of simply perceptible features of an object is the aspect of an object relevant to it being art – where "perceptible" is understood according to some form of foundationalism (a very non-

Kantian epistemology). The composition of simply perceptible features such as colour, line, shape, form and texture is understood to be perceived without any conceptual or inferential engagement.[2] This naive, causal account of perception, which is so completely at odds with Kant's epistemology, is the basis of the formalism attributed to him by the majority of contemporary philosophers of art and art historians. I call this concept of aesthetic formalism, "thin aesthetic formalism".

Nick Zangwill's self-professed "neo-Kantianism" is a case in point. In order to distinguish aesthetic properties from non-aesthetic properties, he distinguishes between two kinds of judgement, substantive and representational. Zangwill treats substantive judgements as having "intention *independent* normative demand" in a way representational judgements do not.[3] For example, according to Zangwill, while, "that a tree is represented *by someone*" is an element in the object of our representational judgement of a painting of a tree (what the artist intended to depict), in contrast, no intention on the part of the artist is an element in the object of our substantive judgement of the painting. Zangwill considers that aesthetic judgements are substantive judgements.[4] The absence of intentionality in the object of substantive judgements as Zangwill conceives them suggests they are passively received, and as such their evaluative element (which a subset of substantive judgements imply) hardly takes in more than Kant's notion of the agreeable.[5] The agreeable has a sensuous or empirical base; the feeling connected to it is not necessary and is an irreducible aspect of experience.

Aesthetic judgements as conceived by Kant present a third alternative to Zangwill's representational and substantive judgements respectively. For Kant, the structure of aesthetic judgement is analogous to the structure of moral judgement. Consider that moral judgements are like representational judgements

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2. For a shortcut to the issues involved in this foundationalism and their incompatibility with Kant's epistemology, see Charles Taylor's essay on McDowell's *Mind and World*: "Foundationalism and the Inner-Outer Distinction", in N. H. Smith (ed.), *Reading McDowell: on Mind and World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 106–19.
3. N. Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 33.
4. Judgements of beauty and ugliness are treated as evaluations that "supervene" on substantive judgements. Zangwill, *Beauty*, 36.
5. Zangwill, *Beauty*, 16.

in having intention *dependent* normative demand, that is, we factor in a person's intention when judging their actions (including our own). However, like a subset of substantive judgements (and unlike representational judgements) they imply an evaluation which is in part dependent on context.[6] Aesthetic judgements according to Kant are like this, Zangwill's interpretation notwithstanding. Aesthetic judgements have intention *dependent* normative demand as demonstrated by the way we can reconceive an object and as a consequence perceive beauty where previously we could not. Aesthetic judgements are constituted in part by the perceiver's intentions relative to the culturally acquired concept the perceived object engages; as for example is the case when we perceive nature as "landscape", a naked person as a "nude" or a representation of a person as a "portrait". The aesthetic object is always an intentional object. Furthermore, according to Kant, the evaluation is synonymous with a peculiar feeling of liking, where aesthetic judgement is concerned, and endorsement, where moral judgement is concerned.

The thin formalism in Zangwill's account is the passivity – the intention *independent* normative demand – in his account of aesthetic judgement. His examples bear this out further. Zangwill claims that flowers believed to be plastic do not differ aesthetically from flowers believed to be real nor that a polar bear believed to be a real bear swimming under water differs aesthetically from what is believed to be a perceptibly indistinguishable man in a bear suit swimming under water.[7] Zangwill concludes: "Lovers of beauty are indeed lovers of sights and sounds".[8]

Defenders of a thin aesthetic formalism typically refer to various passages in the Analytic of the Beautiful in order to support their interpretation. In fact, Kant uses some examples that when taken on face value appear to support the intention *independent* normative demand of Zangwill's concept of aesthetic judgement. For example, that the appreciation of birdsong is ruined when one learns it is a person mimicking a bird shows that in this case, according to Kant, our appreciation of birdsong is "probably" not a pure aesthetic judgement.[9] This leads one to presume that if it were a pure aesthetic

6. Zangwill, *Beauty*.
7. Zangwill, *Beauty*, 115–16.
8. Zangwill, *Beauty*, 144.
9. I. Kant. *Critique of Judgement,* W. S. Pluhar (trans.) (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), §22 '243, p.94.

judgement, knowing the source of the song would not affect our aesthetic appreciation of it. However, this example appears in the context of separating the pleasures of charm from the pleasure of beauty. Kant is attempting to provide examples of the charming and to demonstrate how we can distinguish the charming from the beautiful in practice. With this example, Kant distinguishes an empirical from a non-empirical basis for liking aspects of the world. The latter is grounded in Reason's causality, but in this case of mimicked bird song, Reason thwarted the pleasure and hence the pleasure originally felt in the birdsong was not the result of aesthetic judgement.

The liking of birdsong is an example of empirical not free causality because the liking is deemed to be empirically based and hence based on non-necessary extrinsic features of the object as opposed to non-empirically based, necessary[10] intrinsic features of the object. However, given Kant's theory of theoretical Reason, what we consider intrinsic features of an object are partly the result of the concepts we bring to bear upon the object in the course of perceiving it.

Any relation between Imagination and Understanding in a particular manifestation of perception will be in virtue of the concept we hold of the object even though that actual concept does not feature in the object of the aesthetic judgement. We can think of it this way. The concept we hold of an object determines what is psychologically salient in our perception of it. Hence, the concept we hold will determine whether we apprehend features which lend themselves to an aesthetic unity or other aesthetic features. What rules out birdsong as a pure aesthetic judgement in this case is that the object of the liking seems to be a mere impression and Kant brings this out by how easy it is to change the impression. On the other hand, one might have exploited this example to reach the opposite conclusion. This does not jeopardize our interpretation of Kant's aesthetic theory but instead demonstrates an important implication of Kant's aesthetic theory: that the one object can be charming or beautiful depending on how one engages with it. Kant

[10] The term 'necessary' is used in the sense of *a priori* or conceptual. Aesthetic appreciation refers to a certain kind of pleasing characterisation, rather than a characterisation that may or may not please.

implies as much when he revisits this example in the Deduction and treats the initial pleasure *as* an aesthetic judgement. The context is a discussion of the interest we take in beauty for its role in furthering culture, our second natures and intersubjectivity.[11] We find a person mimicking birdsong tasteless because we take an interest in the beauty of nature; that is, the beauty is not based on an interest but instead the interest follows on from having found nature beautiful in the first place. We are interested and reflect upon the way nature seems perfectly suited to our perception of it. This influences the way we orientate ourselves to the world relevant to the possibility of intersubjectivity. This empirical interest in beauty furthers culture by encouraging communities to create opportunities for aesthetic judgement. This in turn cultivates intersubjectivity and hence our sense of being incorporated into nature and community.[12]

Pure aesthetic judgements can be understood to involve intention *dependent* normative demand because of the way aesthetic judgements redeploy the aspects of mind involved in empirical judgement in a way which presupposes agency and freedom. Nonetheless, the first mention of the birdsong example (§22) does lend itself to misunderstanding unless assiduously placed in the context of his theory of theoretical Reason and considered in light of Kant's later discussion of the birdsong example in the Deduction (§42).

Contrary to Zangwill's alleged neo-Kantianism, our belief regarding whether flowers are plastic or real *is* aesthetically relevant to an aesthetic judgement of them and our belief regarding whether a polar bear swimming under water is a man in a bear suit or a real bear *is* also aesthetically relevant. Kant uses the birdsong example to argue on the one hand, that much of what we take to be beautiful is really only charming and in this case based on an idea we find agreeable, and on the other hand, that when we judge nature beautiful it is always accompanied or followed by an interest in the fact that we can find nature apt for our perception of it.[13] This empirical interest turns

11. Kant, *Judgement*, §42 '302, p.169.
12. Anthony Savile develops this idea in his *Aesthetic Reconstructions*, *The Seminal Writings of Lessing, Kant and Schiller* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 184.
13. Kant, *Judgement*, §22 '243, p.94 and §42 '302, p.169. The first mention of the birdsong example is at section 22, which is the last section of the Analytic of the Beautiful. The second discussion of the birdsong example is in the context of our intellectual interest in beauty which appears in section 42 as part of the Deduction of Pure Aesthetic

out to be crucial for the role of aesthetic judgement in cultivating intersubjectivity and the appropriate orientation to the world which in turn is conducive for both theoretical knowledge and moral action, as we will see later.

Stephen Davies is another philosopher who has promulgated the thin formalist account of Kant's aesthetic theory, even though he acknowledges that it is an interpretation owed to art theorists of the early twentieth century.[14] He characterizes a Kantian pure beauty as a pleasingness based on an object's pure form, where pure form is characterized in opposition to functionality, conceptual content, and merely sensuous gratification.[15] Davies understands the perception of "pure form" to mean a passive reception of composition while, by contrast, Kant explains it as the "purposive form in the [way] the presentational powers are determined in their engagement with the object".[16] On the basis of his characterization of Kant's aesthetic theory, Davies identifies formal aesthetic properties as "objective formal features of the item … depending on its material properties but unaffected by…knowledge of the work's background…how it fitted with the tradition or what its maker intended".[17] Davies concludes his summary of Kant's aesthetic theory: "The disinterested perception of free beauty is cognitively based, even while it does not involve conceptual categorization, because it rests on the free play of the imagination and the understanding".[18] Davies does not attempt to explain what he takes this to mean or how the cognitively based nature of the judgement is supposed to be compatible with his interpretation that Kant's aesthetic theory treats aesthetic properties as "material properties…unaffected by … knowledge" including intention, background and tradition. That it is "cognitively based" is clearly incompatible with the thin aesthetic formalism he attributes to Kant's aesthetic theory (not to mention it is also ambiguous and misleading in relation to Kant's actual aesthetic theory).

While thin aesthetic formalism can find textual support in selected

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Judgements.

14. S. Davies, "Aesthetic Judgements, Artworks and Functional Beauty", *Philosophical Quarterly* 56 (2006) :223, 224–41. The relevant passages can be found on pages 225–26.
15. Davies, "Aesthetic Judgements", 225.
16. Kant, *Judgement*, §15, '228, Pluhar, p.75.
17. Davies, "Aesthetic Judgements", 226.
18. Davies, "Aesthetic Judgements", 225.

passages in the Analytic of the Beautiful as we have seen, it is in the Deduction that Kant sets out the grounds of aesthetic judgement and this is where his theoretical, critical intentions are to the fore. In the Analytic, one can extract two sets of features of beauty: experiential and analytic, which on the face of it seem contradictory. However, in the Deduction these features are qualified and grounded. As a consequence, the fuller account of Kant's aesthetic theory emerges so that what appeared contradictory in Book I can be understood as complementary after the Deduction.

The thin aesthetic formalism attributed to Kant has been immensely influential in determining what has been considered the basis of art's ontology and in turn, the relevant evaluative concepts for art criticism in the twentieth century. Thin formalism has provided the key terms of reference for theories of art, either as support for a thin formalist theory[19] or as a foil for those developing alternative accounts.[20] Today artists and critics continue to formulate the possibilities of art in terms of two oppositions: formalism and conceptualism.[21] As such, it can be argued that Kant's legacy for the Artworld, even if it is based on a misrepresentation of his ideas, has been to determine what is deemed possible in art in terms of this dichotomy.

In contrast, I argue that Kant's aesthetic theory aims to identify that aspect of mind through which we connect the realm of practical Reason (the grounds of free will) to the empirical world. The aspect in question involves a feeling that is not empirically based and hence not an irreducible aspect of experience. Instead, it is a feeling that has an *a priori* grounding, or in other words, is a feeling whose empirical

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19. For example, C. Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914); C. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. I. *Perceptions and Judgements, 1939–1944.* J. O'Brian (ed.), (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986); R. Fry, *Vision and Design* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1937); Zangwill, *Beauty*.
20. For example, F. C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); P. Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Indianapolis, IN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); P. Bourdieu, "The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic", in *Analyic Aesthetics,* R. Shusterman (ed.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 147–60; Davies, "Aesthetic Judgements".
21. The way art is conceived according to these two extremes is demonstrated by a recent collection of essays written by prominent philosophers who address the problem of classifying conceptual art in relation to the aesthetic (the latter defined according to thin formalism). See P. Goldie and E. Schellekens (eds.), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

objects can be determined by Reason. This is incompatible with the naive notion of perception that underpins thin formalist accounts of aesthetic judgement. I will provide the textual support for the alternative account, the thick aesthetic formalist reading of Kant's aesthetic theory shortly and explain how the notion of a feeling grounded in *a priori* principles serves Kant's larger aims. For now, however, it will suffice to have cast doubt on the entrenched assumption that Kant's aesthetic theory supports a thin concept of aesthetic formalism.

II. Thick Aesthetic Formalism

The aesthetic theory of Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* identifies the capacities that are a condition for the way we value art and experience beauty in nature. It can be identified as a thick formalist theory in the sense that Kant identifies the features of aesthetic judgement and the way these features are grounded in his system of the mind rather than how these conditions might manifest differently from culture to culture. Kant does draw upon examples when they serve his point and these are necessarily constrained by his cultural perspective. However, these examples are demonstrations of particular features of judgement rather than exemplars of beauty. When Kant writes for example that "the foliage on borders or on wallpaper … mean nothing on their own: they represent nothing, no object under a determinate concept, and are free beauties",[22] he is attempting to demonstrate what it is like to focus upon the "form of the imagination's presentation of the object" rather than an object's extrinsic purpose (function) or intrinsic purpose (the considerations against which one measures its perfection) which he discusses in the preceding section. The "foliage on borders" example is a demonstration of a principle – a limit case if you will – not an ideal.

There is a second sense in which Kant's aesthetic theory exhibits "thick formalism" and this is the sense in which concepts we have developed, learnt or internalized over a life-time influence the object of aesthetic judgement. We do not focus on the concept in judging aesthetically. However, whether or not the Imagination and

22. Kant, *Judgement*, §16 '229, Pluhar, 76–77.

Understanding's harmony is such as to alert our attention away from the concept will depend upon whether the "form of the Imagination's presentation of the object" is harmonious relative to the concept of the object provided by the Understanding. Kant writes that the attunement between the Imagination and Understanding, which is a condition of all cognition, varies "depending on what difference there is among the objects that are given".[23] In addition, by drawing upon what Kant has established about empirical knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we can also assume that our empirical concepts develop in part through inference, associations and the unifying principles of Reason.[24] However, the aesthetic judgement is still pure in the sense that that aspect of mind which gives rise to beauty is the harmony between the Imagination and Understanding rather than the empirical content of the relevant concept. This is analogous to the way Kant distinguishes pure representations from empirical ones in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where pure representations consist in relations provided by the mind *a priori*, even though we cannot access these relations unless they are manifested in perceptual objects.[25]

An account of the object of aesthetic judgement compatible with Kant's theory of theoretical Reason is that the relevant aspect to aesthetic judgement is the composition or configuration grasped or non-inferentially perceived in virtue of concepts, prior inferences, experience, associations, interpretations, or acquired reliable dispositions to respond differentially to (causal) stimuli[26] (such as in the case of enjoying the culturally acquired category of "landscape"). One might say in contemporary naturalized terminology: the proximal stimuli triggers formerly internalized gestalts.[27]

The two senses in which Kant's aesthetic theory can be understood as an example of thick aesthetic formalism are directly supported

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23. Kant, *Judgement*,, §21 '238, Pluhar, 88.
24. I. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* N. K. Smith (trans.) (New York: Macmillan, 2007), A302, B359, 303.
25. Kant, *Pure Reason*, A20, B35, 66.
26. This is a paraphrase of an expression used by Robert Brandom in *his* "Non-inferential Knowledge, Perceptual Experience, and Secondary Qualities: Placing McDowell's Empiricism", in N. H. Smith (ed.), *Reading McDowell: on Mind and World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 92–105 (96).
27. The notion is that formerly internalized gestalts involve concept formation in their genealogy and hence intentionality even though when applied the process might seem automatic.

throughout the Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgements. The capacity of mind that interests Kant and that he reasons is a condition of our engagement with art is a capacity linked to our freedom from the determinism of nature.[28] In making and appreciating art, and in finding nature beautiful, we exercise a part of ourselves not compelled by our personal interests or physical needs or desires. This is the aspect of mind that cannot be reduced to, described by, nor subsumed under the physical laws of nature. Kant would ground this aspect in a supersensible substrate of humanity but he provides the elements for a reconstruction of this concept where he introduces his particular version of a "*Sensus Communis*".[29] At this point his discussion of our sociable and acculturated selves, particularly our empirical interest in beauty, provides the elements needed for a reconstruction of the supersensible substrate of humanity into a concept of our second natures.

The *Sensus Communis* refers to a condition for intersubjectivity, hence community and the furthering of culture. This is linked to our capacity to cultivate our responses to beauty. The notion is that in being oriented to the world in a way which promotes our feeling of liking for it on non-empirical grounds (not based on satisfaction of appetites or personal benefit) we are moving in the direction of endorsing it which is a peculiarly moral feeling according to Kant. We feel incorporated in rather than alienated from the world. This is also relevant to our ability to conceive of ourselves as a part of a community.

Kant writes: "The beautiful prepares us for loving something, even nature, without [personal] interest".[30] If we keep in mind that Kant is interested in the conditions for intersubjectivity, we can see why certain features of our aesthetic judgements were of interest to him. In the theoretical part of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, the Deduction, Kant grounds the non-cognitive, non-sensuous, non-empirical nature of aesthetic judgements in a way that is compatible

28. For a helpful discussion on how the analogy between universal validity in cognition and universal validity in judgement nonetheless supports the relation between aesthetic judgement and freedom, see A. Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy* (Palo-Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 19–22.
29. Kant introduces the *Sensus Communis* in the *Critique of Judgement* at the end of the Analytic of the Beautiful at §20-22 and develops this notion further mid way through the Deduction at §39-42.
30. Kant, *Judgement*, General exposition following §29, '267, Pluhar, 127.

with an aesthetic judgement's rule governedness and communicability. He does this in the following way:

(i) As aesthetic judgement is noncognitive or nonconceptual, it can be connected necessarily with a feeling. Strictly speaking then, the outcome of aesthetic judgement is not knowledge of the world. As such, the process involved is not what we would normally call cognition. It is important for Kant that aesthetic judgement is not a cognition because if it were, "it would be futile to [try to] derive from it the pleasure connected with it".[31]

(ii) As aesthetic judgement is neither sensuous nor personal, it is not the result of natural necessity or natural causality and hence is amenable to the influence of Reason (or acculturation).

(iii) It is not an empirically grounded feeling because then it would not be normative and would not be connected with freedom or the moral law. For Kant, a feeling grounded empirically is an irreducible aspect of experience. In contrast, Kant was interested in the possibility of a feeling that was malleable by culture and Reason.[32] This "feeling" would be connected with our freedom, that is, the moral law (freedom and moral law are "inseparably connected" for Kant).[33]

(iv) Finally, beauty is the expression of Aesthetic Ideas (an empirical or intuitable form of the pure concepts of Reason). We will see that it is through the experience of Aesthetic Ideas that we experience empirical objects or events as exhibiting an aspect that evokes a sensibility connected to, though not the same as, a moral sensibility.[34] Through Aesthetic Ideas, a sensibility grounded in our freedom is given an intuitable form.

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31. Kant is discussing the non-cognitive nature of the concept of the moral. *Judgement,* §12, '222, Pluhar, 67.
32. This may seem to be incompatible with Kant's notion of moral autonomy. I would argue that the third critique further refines the concept of moral autonomy. To explore this fully falls outside the scope of this paper.
33. Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:93.
34. Throughout the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason in the second critique Kant emphasizes the dissimilarity of empirical and rational determining grounds. See Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:20-5:106, 17–89.

> Hence, the realm of Reason or the moral law is brought in touch with our (empirical) experience.
> This last point requires some background and further argument. I turn to this task now.

III. Aesthetic Judgement and Moral Motivation: Grounding Compatibilism

To develop the positive argument for thick aesthetic formalism, one draws attention to the aspect of mind exercised by aesthetic judgement, and this is our capacity for intersubjectivity, which in turn is crucial for awakening us to, as Kant would say, our moral vocation. To fully appreciate this, one needs to turn back to the *Critique of Practical Reason* where Kant discusses the motivation for moral action.[35] There, Kant attempts to find in the system of the mind a basis for moral motivation or endorsement which is compatible with the individual's autonomy on the one hand, and the demands of the moral law on the other. In addition, as Kant dismisses compatibilism as a subterfuge, he has to explain how moral autonomy is possible.[36]

Kant, it would seem, held the view that if we claim to be compatibilists, we need to be entitled to do so. That is, we need a transcendental argument to support the possibility of free will in a world determined by physical laws. Most contemporary philosophers who defend compatibilism typically do so by grounding a notion of free will in the level of experience and intersubjectivity allowed and promoted through language (or concepts compatible with language).[37] Our interactions with other members of our community reach levels of sophistication by virtue of the norms, assumptions, constructs and systems of belief made possible in virtue of the representations and concepts which in turn depend upon abilities

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35. Kant, *Practical Reason*, Book 1, Ch. III, "On the Incentives of Pure Practical Reason", 5:72-5:106, 62–89.
36. Kant, *Practical Reason*, Book 1, Ch. III, 5:96, 1997, 80–1.
37. I have in mind D. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* J. Shapiro (trans.) (London: Heinemann, 1972); J. McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) and possibly R. Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), although Brandom conceives the way language evolves as necessary.

linked to language capacity. This can promote ontogenetic development in the individual that takes her beyond, though not necessarily out of touch with, her primary, instinctual nature.

There are many disputes regarding the interface between the empirical world and the intentionality, agency or will demonstrated by human beings. Certain philosophers argue that indeterminate concepts or non-conceptual content must be a part of the system of the mind because otherwise creativity, new concepts and intersubjectivity would not be possible. To spell out the details of the various positions is beyond the scope of this article. It is sufficient for our purposes to acknowledge that Kant was a precursor to these arguments. He realized that to account for intersubjectivity, the system of the mind must provide a rule-based judgement whose rule cannot be identified or exhaustively articulated but is instead exemplified in the normative commitments of one's judgement. Kant writes: "We could even define taste as the ability to judge something that makes our feeling in a given presentation universally communicable without mediation by a concept".[38] The range and scope of our communication is not completely exhausted by determinate conceptual schemes but allows for cultural plasticity, growth and rejuvenation on a cultural, community level. That is, our communicative capacity is not set and predetermined but is responsive to new emerging cultural conditions. In this sense aesthetic judgement is "exemplary of judgement and experience in general".[39] The concept of our second natures that can be derived from the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* relies upon what we would now refer to as "the space of reasons" as opposed to the realm of causes; the latter is concerned with predetermined actions, while the former exercises our agency, intentionality or freedom.[40]

Kant thought of the empirical content of concepts as naturally caused (answering to our physical needs and interests) and this is why he postulated pure concepts of Reason, the latter were

38. Kant, *Judgement*, §40 '295, Pluhar, 162.
39. This point emerged from discussions with Pierre Keller at the APA. See also F. Hughes, *Kant's Aesthetic Epistemology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).
40. "Space of reasons" is a term used by Wilfrid Sellars in his "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", which was first published in 1956 and reprinted in R. Brandom (ed.), *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

conceived in freedom rather than empirically. However, instead of thinking about the concepts of Reason as resulting from the intersubjectivity promoted through language, Kant in the second critique treats freedom as a condition rather than a consequence of intersubjectivity. However, it remains to be shown how our free or supersensible selves mesh with our causal and empirical selves.[41] Kant addresses this problem through the basis of respect for the moral law. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, a basis for moral motivation is identified. In the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason, the good is treated as the object of practical Reason and respect for the moral law as the motivation to moral conduct. It is, Kant writes, "Reason, from which alone can arise any rule that is to contain necessity, does indeed put necessity even into this precept (for otherwise it would not be an imperative)".[42] Kant argues in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that the concept of the moral *contains* the will to act in accordance with it. The concept of the moral for Kant is not a mere cognition as in that case he could not connect it necessarily with the respect for the moral law which he says in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* is a kind of pleasure.[43] He writes of the feeling of respect that it is "a special and peculiar modification of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure which does seem to differ somehow from both the pleasure and the displeasure we get from empirical objects".[44]

However the problem becomes how to connect a law discovered through Reason with a particular kind of feeling. In other words, while we might be able to identify moral laws through Reason there is no necessity to act upon them. The rationality of the moral law might be understood without thereby becoming a motivation for action. The latter requires endorsement of the moral law. Kant needs to show how the moral law connects with our sensuous selves, the empirical world so as to show how it can affect actions in the world.

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41. Philosophy of language and mind, epistemology and metaphysics are still fuelled by this problem. Whether a solution is accepted by any particular philosopher depends on the assumptions and concerns she brings to the table. As such it is likely that there will never be one solution but various schools of thought on the issue, which is the state of play at present.
42. Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:20 Gregor, 18.
43. Kant, *Judgement*, §12 '222, Pluhar, 67.
44. Kant, *Judgement*, §12 '222, Pluhar, 67.

He needs to do this in a way which is compatible with the individual's autonomy and freedom from the determinism of our physical nature.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explains that when we apprehend the moral law our personal conceit is humiliated, and anything that humiliates us is an object of respect. In this sense, our respect is a feeling caused by our freedom (by which he means that part of us not governed or defined by our physical or sensuous selves). Nonetheless, this connection between the moral law and this special kind of non-empirical feeling is left rather vague and it is this issue that he pursues in writing the third critique.

In the first introduction to the third critique, Kant identifies two kinds of pleasure: one that forms a mere aggregate with the mental powers, and another that forms a system with the mental powers. The former has merely empirical bases and either follows the power of desire, or is one and the same thing with the power of desire. The latter, in contrast, is "independent of the determination of the power of desire and can even serve as a basis determining it".[45] In this sense it must be understood as based on *a priori* principles. Here, then, Kant locates a basis for pleasure or satisfaction from within the system of the mind that is not evoked by empirical or natural causes. His Analytic of the Beautiful identifies the object of such a pleasure while the Deduction suggests how we are to understand the *a priori* principles upon which it is based.

The perspective from which the elements of Kant's aesthetic theory form a unified and coherent theory is just this: while Kant attempts to find a basis for motivation to act on the moral law in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he arguably fails, and attempts instead to find an analogy for it in aesthetic judgement. Consider again his notion of free beauty:

> When we judge free beauty (according to mere form) then our judgement of taste is pure. Here we presuppose no concept of any purpose for which the manifold is to serve the given object, and hence no concept [as to] what the object is [meant] to represent; our imagination is playing, as it were, while it contemplates the shape, and such a concept would only *restrict*

45. Kant, *Judgement*, §12 '222, Pluhar, 67. First Introduction, III '206, Pluhar, 395.

its freedom.[46]

"Restrict our imagination's freedom" is the key to this passage. "Restrict its freedom" refers to keeping the Imagination in the service of the empirical, the sensuous, the first nature to which we are compelled by our physical needs. Instead, when we judge free beauty, we are engaging our second natures, our transcendental selves, that aspect of our selves that has been cultivated through our interactions within our communities, that part of our taste that can be cultivated and educated to form a system of the mind with our moral duty rather than the aspect of ourselves susceptible to personal whimsy, inclination, empirically based feeling or desires. In the third critique, Kant attempts to show that the grounds for the pleasure of beauty are *a priori* as an analogy to the way the grounds of the endorsement for the moral law are also *a priori*. This is what we turn to now.

IV. Liking Beauty and Endorsing the Moral Law

In the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* Kant identifies how the processes or powers involved in acquiring empirical knowledge can be redeployed in order for us to feel ourselves oriented to the world in our freedom rather than simply tied to the world through physically determined interests. The relevant powers (or faculties) as discussed earlier are the Imagination and the Understanding and their redeployment, the "Harmony of the Faculties". The pure concepts of Reason are also redeployed in aesthetic judgement and in this guise referred to as "Aesthetics Ideas".[47]

The Harmony of the Faculties is always accompanied by Aesthetic Ideas. The notion is that when enjoying beauty one attends to an aspect of perceiving for which no determinate concept is adequate. However, the system of the mind requires some outcome in order to reach equilibrium or harmony. In the case of enjoying the view, so to speak, no equilibrium is forthcoming unless one switches back to a determinate representation, such as "It is a tree". The experience of beauty when it is grounded simply on the Harmony of the Faculties

46. Kant, *Judgement*, §12 '222, Pluhar, 67. §16 '299-230, Pluhar, 77.
47. I provide a detailed account of how Kant might have envisaged the necessary connection between the Harmony of the Faculties and Aesthetic Ideas in *Aesthetics and Material Beauty: Aesthetics Naturalized* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

seems to contravene the determinacy and coherence demanded of the unifying principles of Reason. Kant suggests, however, that there is a way that enjoying the Harmony of the Faculties can be given a concept of its own without switching back to a determinate concept. You may recall that if the relevant harmony were based on a determinate concept, it would not be linked necessarily with a feeling and hence would not have been of interest to the problem of intersubjectivity, communicability and moral sensibility.

The solution suggested by Kant is that Reason throws up *a concept that has no percept* for a *percept that has no concept*. A concept that has no percept is a concept that does not originate in empirical judgement and this for Kant is a pure concept of Reason or a rational idea. For example, ideas such as freedom, God, immortality and infinity are ideas for which there is no evidence in nature. In the event of experiencing the Harmony of the Faculties which can only occur when one is perceiving an object (the object of the harmony are relations provided by the mind in the course of perceiving an object), rational ideas are evoked. However, we do not become aware of these ideas in a determinate form but instead through the fragments, feelings, intimations and other associations that one has inadvertently accumulated over one's lifetime that are related to the themes intimated by rational ideas. Hence in aesthetic judgements the Harmony of the Faculties stimulates Aesthetic Ideas and we experience the latter as if they were expressed by the beautiful object.[48] As Kant writes: "We may in general call beauty (whether natural or artistic) the expression of aesthetic ideas … The idea of which that object is regarded as the *expression*".[49]

The actual content of the experience will depend on one's own metaphysical or religious commitments or lack thereof because, as evoked by the Harmony of the Faculties, these ideas are experienced through a personal lens. According to Kant's aesthetic theory,

48. There are a variety of interpretations given to Kant's doctrine of Aesthetic Ideas. A common interpretation, but one I reject as it contravenes the textual evidence (and the whole point of the third critique), is that the *representational content* of an object or artwork needs to be literally expressive of moral ideas. For example, see Savile, *Aesthetic Reconstructions*, 177; P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 390. Andrew Chignell is an exception to this focus on moral content. See A. Chignell, "Kant on the Normativity of Taste: The Role of Aesthetic Ideas", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85.3 (2007), 415–33.
49. Kant, *Judgement*, §51 '320, Pluhar, 189.

Aesthetic Ideas give an intuitable form to rational ideas. Kant writes:

> [T]aste is basically an ability to judge the [way in which] moral ideas are made sensible ([it judges this] by means of a certain analogy in our reflection about [these ideas and their renderings in sensibility]); the pleasure that taste declares valid for mankind as such and not just for each person's private feeling must indeed derive from this link and from the resulting increase in our receptivity for the feeling that arises from moral ideas (and is called moral feeling). Plainly, then, the … [preliminary learning] that will truly establish our taste consists in developing our moral ideas and in cultivating moral feeling; for only when sensibility is made to harmonize with this feeling can genuine taste take on a definite, unchangeable form.[50]

In this ingenious way, Kant finds a basis for endorsement for the ideas of Reason which we nonetheless experience as of the world, and hence we orientate ourselves to the empirical world in a way consistent with what Kant would term our moral vocation. As such, an analogy is found for what Kant attempted but failed to identify in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The *a priori* principles in which the pleasure of beauty is grounded provides an analogy for the grounds of endorsement for the moral law or moral motivation – a motivation which is not based in personal interest, satisfaction of appetites or any personal bias. The analogous feeling to this respect for the moral law in aesthetic judgement is called disinterested pleasure.

To summarize, what we have is a perception of the empirical world that gives rise to ideas from the realm of Reason that we experience *as if they were* of the world. The result is that we not only find pleasure in the beautiful object, but the feeling evoked approaches respect, endorsement or moral sensibility. Through beauty we are oriented to the world in a way that Kant understands as awakening our freedom or our moral selves, or we might say, facilitating a felt harmony between the world and ourselves. As mentioned earlier, this analogy between beauty and morality is deduced in part from the role of aesthetic judgement in sociability and the furthering of culture. I will explore this further now through Kant's concept of the "*Sensus Communis*".

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50. Kant, *Judgement,* §60, '356, Pluhar, 232.

V. *Sensus Communis* and the Beautiful as the Symbol of the Morally Good

Kant writes early on in the Analytic of the Beautiful that aesthetic judgement reveals to the transcendental philosopher "a property of our cognitive power which without this analysis would have remained unknown".[51] The special power of aesthetic judgement of reflection is its universality (that it makes a claim upon everyone's assent) while necessarily involving a particular kind of pleasure. He writes later:

> Now I maintain that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good; and only because we refer the beautiful to the morally good (we all do so naturally and require all others also to do so, as a duty) does our liking for it include a claim to everyone else's assent.[52]

Kant continues:

> The morally good is the *intelligible* [that can be apprehended only by the intellect not by the senses] that taste has in view …; for it is with this intelligible that even our higher cognitive powers harmonize, and without this intelligible contradictions would continually arise from the contrast between the nature of these powers and the claims that taste makes.[53]

Kant sees aesthetic judgement as a way through which pure concepts of Reason can be experienced as of the world, and hence, in virtue of this experience we orient ourselves to the world in a way that is conducive to our liking it, of being confident in our ability to know the world and endorsing aspects of it. Kant writes:

> [J]udgment finds itself referred to something that is both in the subject himself and outside him, something that is neither nature nor freedom, and yet is linked with the basis of freedom, the supersensible, in which the theoretical and the practical

51. Kant, *Judgement,* §8 '213, Pluhar, 57.
52. Kant, *Judgement,* §59 '353, Pluhar, 228.
53. Kant, *Judgement,* §59 '353, Pluhar, 229.

> power are in an unknown manner combined and joined into a unity.[54]

Hence the basis of our aesthetic and moral autonomy is universal, we treat the subjective where aesthetic and moral considerations are concerned *as if they were objective*[55] and the basis of the judgement is non-cognitive yet Reason regulates its non-cognitive base. We have seen that the supersensible substrate of humanity makes the communication of these law governed, yet indeterminate concepts possible. However, this notion is further developed through the concept of the "*Sensus Communis*".

Kant uses the term "*Sensus Communis*" somewhat differently to his predecessors. While the term had been used by earlier philosophers to refer to, among other things, that sense which unites all sensory impressions into a coherent whole, Kant uses the term to refer to the basis of intersubjectivity; a natural faculty whose principles nonetheless are acquired through interaction within our communities. It is through this notion that Kant explains how the supersensible substrate of humanity gets traction in the empirical world. He describes the *Sensus Communis* as follows:

> We must [here] take sensus communis to mean the idea of a sense shared [by all of us], i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting [something], in order as it were to compare our own judgement with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones, an illusion that would have a prejudicial influence on the judgement. Now we do this as follows: we compare our judgement not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgements of others, and [thus] put ourselves in the position of everyone else.[56]

With this notion of *Sensus Communis*, Kant shifts the emphasis from the first person account of aesthetic perception or taste that you find

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54. Kant, *Judgement,* § 59 '353 Pluhar, 229.
55. Kant, *Judgement,* §32 '281 Pluhar, 145.
56. Kant, *Judgement,,* §40, '293–4, Pluhar, 160.

in many of his predecessors' accounts to a communal account of intersubjective aesthetic judgement. Through aesthetic judgement we are engaging with the world in a subjective way which nonetheless presupposes a communal view.

The *Sensus Communis* addresses that feature of aesthetic judgement that earlier in the Analytic of the Beautiful he characterizes by the phrase "as if it were objective".[57] Others may disagree with us and while we cannot simply take on board their aesthetic judgements based on testimony we can look again and attempt to configure the object in such a way that we can perceive what they perceive. On the other hand, we might find that we are justified in our judgement and that our companions have missed some crucial element. In any case, there is always a reference to other's views even though one can only be said to have an aesthetic judgement if one has a particular subjective feeling. This is a judgement that is non-cognitive but intentional: it orientates us to the world in a way relevant to both empirical and ethical judgements.

For us the "as if it were objective"[58] refers to a psychological tendency where taste judgements are concerned, which might be explained by the way convention makes community possible in creatures with higher cognitive powers or agency. The "as if it were objective" captures a characteristic of the way convention or value is objectified; it gains its status through intersubjectivity but unless we treat it as objective it would not achieve its purpose. Kant writes:

> Whenever we make a judgement declaring something to be beautiful, we permit no one to hold a different opinion, even though we base our judgement only on our feeling rather than on concepts; hence we regard this underlying feeling as a common rather than a private feeling.[59]

What Kant calls the condition of mind upon which this capacity depends is the *Sensus Communis*. It makes possible the furthering of culture. It grounds intersubjectivity. This sense allows people to cultivate their sociability to the degree whereby they can achieve that mark of the civilized according to which they can respect the rights of

57. Kant, *Judgement,* §32 '281 Pluhar, 145
58. Kant, *Judgement,,* §32 '281 Pluhar, 145.
59. Kant, *Judgement,* §22 '239 Pluhar, 89.

others. However, the sense in which the beautiful is the symbol of morality is just the way that ideas identified through Reason can be given an intuitable form through aesthetic judgement and in virtue of this they can not only be thought but can be experienced, liked and endorsed.

Conclusion

It is clear by the way Kant attempts to find a basis for moral motivation or moral feeling in aesthetic judgement that a thin notion of aesthetic formalism is inadequate to accommodate Kant's larger aims. The object of beauty is apprehended in virtue of the concept we hold of it, even though the relevant aspect in our aesthetic judgement is not an explicit focus on that concept. The object identified by the proponents of thin aesthetic formalism trivializes this important point. In addition, the universality of aesthetic judgement is not conceived in order to regulate artistic standards as is so often assumed by those who attribute to Kant a thin aesthetic formalism. Instead, the universality of aesthetic judgement points to the way aesthetic judgement is exemplary of judgement in general in the sense that the mark of the civilized person is to treat experience as normative, that is, communicable and rule governed.

The theory of art that can be drawn from Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* is deflationary. Art is not of interest in its particular manifestations but only in its very possibility. The condition for art is a capacity for grounding endorsement in intersubjectivity and a capacity for objectifying value. This is borne out in caring about what our peers (or those we would like to consider our peers) think and how they see the world. This is a core feature of the Art world and is a condition for the very possibility of a moral and technically efficient life. However, there is no necessity to any particular style of art implied or defended in the third critique, the thin aesthetic formalists notwithstanding. The only necessity is a non-natural necessity to find some aspect of the world or culture beautiful.

In Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, his system of the mind is completed by finding the grounds of intersubjectivity, which includes establishing the link between theoretical knowledge and practical Reason. As such, aesthetic judgement is crucial to his system as a

whole. Without it we cannot see how practical Reason gets any traction on experience.

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