

## Lebensgefühl and Geistesgefühl in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

It might come as something of a surprise for today's readers to learn that of the three critical investigations undertaken by Immanuel Kant during the 1780s it was the *Critique of Judgment* which would have the broadest readership and the largest impact in Kant's own lifetime. Virtually all of the leading lights of German Idealism and Romanticism—Schelling, Schiller, Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Hegel, to name but a few—found inspiration in Kant's account of the power of judgment. Kant's earlier investigation into the extent and limits of knowledge in his *Critique of Pure Reason* had, by contrast, left many readers cold. As Goethe famously put his response to it: "I found pleasure in the portal, but I dared not set foot in the labyrinth itself; sometimes my gift for poetry got in my way, sometimes common sense."<sup>1</sup> And as for Kant's subsequent effort to think through the transcendental grounds for moral action, this too left many unconvinced. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant had to convince readers that while we would never be able to sensibly discover freedom amidst the mechanical workings of everyday life, we still needed to understand the force of its power for directing human choice. G.W.F. Hegel was particularly cool to Kant's account, asking how an experience drained of positive content in this way might still encourage moral behaviour. For in Hegel's view "this contradiction, which remains insuperable in the system and destroys it, becomes a real inconsistency when this absolute emptiness is supposed to give itself content as practical reason and to expand itself in the form of duties. Theoretical reason lets the intellect give it the manifold which it has only to regulate; it makes no claim to an autonomous dignity, no claim to beget the Son out of itself."<sup>2</sup>

The third of Kant's *Critiques* felt different, however, for this generation of readers. Yes, Kant's arguments contained the familiar caveats regarding epistemic caution, the need to position claims as speculative, heuristic, orientational tools employed by reflective judgment. But again and again Kant took his readers to the edge of something else, either by relying on hybrid terms like "aesthetic ideas" in order to explain cognitions that were otherwise inscrutable, or by pointing past experience and to indeed the supersensible when it came to understanding the work of genius, the order and unity of nature, or indeed the principles which seemed to be guiding organic life. Goethe, for one, described this book as "opening up a wonderful period"<sup>3</sup> in his life, even as he complained about Kant's various caveats, declaring that Kant "had a roguishly ironic way of working: at times he seemed determined to put the narrowest limits on our ability to know things, and at times, with a casual gesture, he pointed beyond the limits he himself had set... leaving it to us to decide how to enjoy the freedom he allows us."<sup>4</sup> And Hölderlin, largely in response to his reading of the *Critique of Judgment*, went so far as to call Kant "the Moses of our nation."<sup>5</sup>

But if the *Critique of Judgment* enjoyed the sort of immediate embrace denied to the earlier works, readers have nonetheless struggled since its first appearance to understand Kant's method for organising the book itself. Even a casual glance reveals Kant to have been at pains to model the structure of the text on the two earlier *Critiques*. Difficulties show up

---

<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "The Influence of Modern Philosophy," in *Goethe: Scientific Studies*, edited and translated by Douglas Miller (New York: Suhrkamp, 1817/1988), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, translated and edited by Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1802/1977), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Goethe, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Goethe, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, Volume 2 (Munich: Hauser Verlag, 1992), p. 726.

immediately, however, upon closer examination. One of the central puzzles here concerns the connection between the two halves of Kant's book, between Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" in Part I, and his "Critique of Teleological Judgment" in Part II. For a number of Kant's readers, the best approach to the problem has been to look for a throughline. Ernst Cassirer, for example, believed that the theme best connecting the two halves of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* was that of 'life' since, as Cassirer understood the basis of Kant's analysis, aesthetic intuition allows us to discover those "formative forces on which the possibility of the beautiful and the possibility of life equally rest,"<sup>6</sup> joining, therefore, Kant's major analyses of aesthetic and teleological judgment. Rudolf Makkreel developed Cassirer's insight at length, arguing that "the idea of life pervades the entire structure of the *Critique of Judgment*" given that, for Kant, "life is not a mere biological phenomenon to be set apart from spirit. In conceiving life, Kant does not think in terms of a dualism; organic life and the life of the mind constitute a continuum allowing a scale of positive and negative values."<sup>7</sup> Angelica Nuzzo is similarly disposed to seeing life as a bridge concept. In her words, "the idea of life and the relation that our embodied *Lebensgefühl* entertains with the reflective faculty of judgment is the leading idea of Kant's inquiry in both the critique of aesthetic and the critique of teleological judgment."<sup>8</sup>

Despite this sense of the basic importance of the concept of "life" for Kant, the many ways in which Kant makes use of it remain significantly understudied as an area of sustained investigation. The purpose of this collection is thus to highlight the ways in which "life" functions, not only as a concept running throughout Kant's works, but insofar as it serves as a connecting thread across Kant's discussions of beauty and nature in the *Critique of Judgment*. One of the clearest examples of life as a concept uniting Kant's discussions of nature and art can be found in his account of "genius." Kant develops his position on this in stages, circling back a number of times to pick up an earlier point now that other parts of his analysis have fallen into place. What emerges is a portrait of not just the genius at work, but attention to the products of such talent, and the impact these have on us in our encounter with fine art. By the end of Kant's book, the parallel between the account here and Kant's later description of organic nature feels inevitable. Our compulsion to see a divine intelligence at work in nature's apparent unity and purpose, our amazement at the way in which organisms are somehow both animated and organised in a way that is both purposive yet free, these experiences have already been introduced to Kant's readers in his initial discussion of our experience of the types of fine art that can only be produced by genius.

The genius displays the type of native talent, according to Kant, that can be neither learned nor taught to others. It is indeed this kind of *sui generis* aspect of the genius which distinguishes the originality of a Goethe from even the learned brilliance of a scientific mind like Newton's. This sort of exemplary, rare capacity identifies a genius as nature's favourite (§49), even as the genius remains themselves neither capable of explaining the specific means by which they achieve perfection in their own work, nor of how they might train others to yield a similar perfection in their own productions. Kant maintains that a beautiful work of fine art is judged to be so for its perfect synthesis of freedom and material form—i.e., of the supersensible and the sensible realms—on the one hand, and its effect on the viewer, on the

---

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, translated by James Hayden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 279.

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the "Critique of Judgment"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 103.

<sup>8</sup> Angelica Nuzzo, *Ideal Embodiment: Kant's Theory of Sensibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 285.

other, insofar as the work yields an experience that cannot be wholly grasped by way of determinate perception. As in the case presented by the organism therefore, the work of fine art hides the specific means, the “rules” by which the artwork has been created by the genius in the first place (§45). When we look at an organism, the manner by which it is “ruled” by the form of its species is hidden from our view; when we encounter a work of fine art like a poem, for example, it is its constraint according to the rules of prosody and metre that remains unseen. Kant is clear when it comes to the importance of these rules for the material construction of the work of art, for it is by these means that the artist is able to transform what would otherwise be the lawless freedom of their genius, into a work that has at last been perfected by means of law, and judged thereby according to the rules of taste (§48). It is in this sense, Kant explains, that taste clips the wings of genius (§50). But just as the genius remains at a loss as to how they have managed, from out of their own nature, to produce a work of fine art that is perfect in its joining of spirit and law, so too is the subject in their encounter with the works produced by genius.

As Kant describes it, the pleasure we feel in our experience of fine art is a response to the way in which our cognition is thrown into a state of play in this encounter. Unable to reduce a piece of fine art to some kind of conceptual determination of it, our imagination breaks free of its usual role in relationship to understanding. In this moment, as Cassirer puts it, “the imagination is in possession of its own autonomous realm into which no conceptual demand and no moral imperative may intrude.”<sup>9</sup> An artwork that has spirit is able to animate the mind of the person who encounters it, Kant tells us, quickening their own spirit into a kind of cognitive free play. In our aesthetic encounter of freedom in the work of art, the imagination is led to produce its own counterpart to rational ideas like God or immortality produced by reason, but in this case the idea is aesthetic. To be specific, our encounter with a work of fine art causes the imagination to produce a multitude of kindred presentations, presentations overflowing the imagination’s attempt to pin down its experience conceptually. The result of this is the imagination’s exhibition of an “aesthetic idea,” Kant explains, “a presentation that makes us add to a concept much that is ineffable, but the feeling of which quickens our cognitive powers” (§49, 5:316). And the fine art with the greatest capacity to affect us in this way, Kant argues, is poetry.

In poetry, language becomes more than letters, it is infused by the spirit of its creator, since “it owes its origin almost entirely to genius and is least open to guidance by precept or examples.” Because, moreover, poetry “fortifies the mind,” giving the mind a sense of its own nature as “free, spontaneous, and independent of natural determination,” poetry, as Kant sees it, “lets the mind feel its ability to use nature on behalf of and, as it were, as a schema of the supersensible” (§53, 5:326). What is this like? Hans Georg Gadamer describes it as the moment when the artwork comes forth. “One reads a poem,” he explains, “one reads it again. One goes through it, and it goes along with one. It is as if it began to sing, and one sings along with it.”<sup>10</sup> Only a genius could produce a poem like this. It is, moreover, in this way that our encounter with the work of art is at the same time an enlivening event, a feeling of spirit and thus of the furtherance of life itself for Kant. As the investigations in this collection will aim to make clear, Kant’s appeal to the “feeling of life” and its various relata so far as the mind experiences it—animation, enlivening, and quickening—provide us with an

---

<sup>9</sup> Cassirer, *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>10</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, “Artworks in Word and Image,” in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23:1 (1992): p. 75. For some further discussion of Gadamer’s account of this see Jennifer Mensch, “The Poem as Plant: Archetype and Metamorphosis in Goethe and Schlegel,” *International Yearbook for Hermeneutics* vol. 13, 2014: 85-106.

exemplary guideline for understanding not just the *Critique of Judgment*, but the significance of freedom in our experience of beauty and nature alike.

\*\*\*

The opening chapter provides a broad overview of Kant's project in the third *Critique* with attention paid along the way to its influence on Kant's immediate successors in the German Idealist and Romantic traditions and on mid-century Continental philosophers. Focusing initially on the tight connection between life, playfulness, and freedom, **Dennis Schmidt** teases out the manner in which "the feeling of life is what thinking feels when thinking is aware of itself" insofar as "the mind for itself," as Kant puts it, "is solely, wholly life (the principle of life itself)" (§29, 5:278). After this the discussion takes up Kant's appeal to the vocabularies of birth and gestation (*beleben, Belebung*), the importance of the symbol and its "hypotyposis" for understanding Kant's approach to life, and finally the best way to approach Kant's effort to connect beauty and the good. As Schmidt explains, "what binds us to the good is this intensification of life and it is this bond and its reflexive fold back into the consciousness of one's own existence, rather than any knowledge—either practical or theoretical—that exposes a sense of what Kant called a 'moral feeling [which] is something merely subjective and which yields no knowledge'." (*Metaphysics of Morals*, 6:400).

In Chapter 2 **James Risser** offers a separate overview, this time from the point of view of Kant's own account of it in the two Introductions written for the third *Critique*. In the Introductions Kant foregrounds the architectonic connection between this last *Critique of Judgment* and the two earlier investigations devoted first to the extent and limits of human knowledge, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), and second to the transcendental basis for moral decision making and action, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). Accordingly, much of the discussion there is focused on accounting for the systematic unity of reason's collective activities, and in particular, on understanding the most difficult task faced by reason in all three of the *Critiques*, namely, the bridge between a transcendently free subject and its experience of a world constrained in every case by the laws of mechanical determinism. The key to understanding the possibility of a bridge between the two realms as "something more than wishful thinking," according to Risser, is seeing how the concept of life is mobilized by Kant in two ways. In Kant's account of aesthetic judgment, it is the "free play" and "quickenings" of the mind in its experience of beauty (or via catharsis in our experience of the sublime) which explains the bridge between empirical experience and a sense of our transcendence from it. In the discussion of teleological judgment, we approach nature by way of analogy, projecting this sense of our own freedom from mechanical determination onto nature. This analogy orients us, allowing us to reflectively entertain the possibility of not just nature's underlying unity and purpose—that is, of our experience of organic life as itself transcendently free, or as somehow "both cause and effect of itself" (§65, 5:372), as Kant puts it—but indeed to discern the existence of a moral teleology or guideline for understanding the history of humankind's freedom itself.

**Courtney Fugate** opens his discussion with something of a puzzle for his readers: given that the third *Critique* is best-known in part for its wide-ranging discussion of our approach to nature—to its organisms, its apparent unity, order, purpose—alongside Kant's response to appeals made in the life sciences to "hylozism," "vitalism," and even a "*Bildungstrieb*," surely here is where we will find a robust account of the concept of "life" as Kant understands it. And yet, as Fugate notes, for Kant's most striking and original uses of the concept we might need to look beyond the *Critique of Judgment* to Kant's other works, including his own handwritten notes and lecture transcripts, precisely in order to see where

the stakes for the concept's appearance in the third *Critique* actually lie. In order to orient the discussion more properly toward a sense of Kant's "creative adaptation and resuscitation of a traditional concept," the chapter opens with a brief but clear overview of the way philosophers before Kant have made room for it in their own metaphysical systems. In this part of the discussion Fugate focuses on the traditional way life has been connected by philosophers to the soul as an animating principle at work as much in plants as animals, with a key shift in this approach appearing only after Thomas Aquinas. In Kant's case, it seems clear that Christian August Crusius was an important influence, and Fugate's detailed analysis is especially interesting, suggesting room for further investigation. As he summarizes Crusius's position, "when we communicate, we do not simply influence the mind of another; we rather cause them to literally come alive in a 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 we intend to communicate." In the remainder of his discussion Fugate patiently takes the reader through Kant's notes and reflections, including comments he is recorded to have said in his lectures on the concept, before turning to Kant's discussion of the "form of life" which emerges in the process of aesthetic judgment. Much as the autonomous moral agent is said by Kant to be both author of and subject to the moral law, (4:431, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*) or the organism suggests an analogy whereby it might be somehow "both cause and effect of itself," when the mind is engaged in a judgment of taste, Fugate argues, we recognize another kind of reciprocity wherein taste is serving both as object and law to itself (e.g., §36, 5:288). In what sense? As Fugate explains, "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 through mutual participation in a normative practice that is intrinsically self-regulating and autonomous."

In Chapter 4 **J. Colin McQuillan** provides more connections for readers interested in understanding Kant's sources and influences when it comes to the concept of life. In McQuillan's reconstruction, Kant's appeal to a "feeling of life," and employment of *eine Belebung* (a "quickening") to describe the state of the cognitive faculties engaged in aesthetic judgment, emerge in fact out of Kant's critique of Alexander Baumgarten and Georg Friedrich Meier's aesthetics. In Baumgarten's formulation, the science of aesthetics was engaged just as much in the perfection of sensible cognition as the scientific pursuit of the truth led to the perfection of intellectual cognition. Key to understanding Baumgarten's aesthetics, however, was the role played by "liveliness" and this was especially prominent in his analysis of poetic art. Much of Baumgarten's work on aesthetics can be said to have received its fullest portrait in the work of his student Meier, whose *Foundations of All Beautiful Sciences* offered a systematic account of aesthetics, including a comprehensive discussion of the aesthetic perfection of life. Meier describes the "sensible life of thoughts"<sup>11</sup> in terms of their connection to the faculty of desire: when living cognition is distinct, it moves the will as the higher faculty of desire, when cognitions are indistinct, by contrast, then feelings of pleasure and pain are aroused insofar as these are linked to the lower faculty of desire. McQuillan describes Kant's response to such accounts as a mixture of hostility and debt. While Kant's rejection of the clarity-distinctness criterion for judging sensibility is well known from his *Inaugural Dissertation* (1770), the previous analyses make it also clear how much use Kant will make of his predecessor's work when it comes to conceiving the state of

---

<sup>11</sup> Georg Friedrich Meier, *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften* (Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1748–1750) Abs. 7.

the mind in aesthetic judgments. Even if Kant rejected Baumgarten's tie between judgment and perfection and identified the free play imagination and the understanding as the site of mental quickening (versus the lower faculties of desire, as Meier had it), it is certainly fair to say that the framework and especially the key notion of life, was already a key part of the discussion by the time Kant came to join the conversation. In her contribution **Kristi Sweet** is interested in convincing readers to reconsider a part of Kant's account that has been mostly ignored by his many commentators, namely, his discussion of the ideal of beauty. In section sixteen of Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment he had distinguished between the unconstrained natural beauty of a flower (an object whose contemplation remains free from any sense of its purpose), and an object like a horse or a use-specific building, where any consideration of beauty is merely accessory or "adherent" to the object's purpose. This means, to use Kant's own example, that while we might like the embellishments provided by the tattoos on a New Zealander, such appreciation falls away once we consider the purpose of this kind of object. What sort of purpose is Kant thinking of here? Kant spends the following section trying to clarify and this is the focus of Sweet's analysis. Humans are unique among objects in their having intrinsic purpose, meaning that when we view them as objects, we are engaged in a judgment that is both aesthetic and intellectual insofar as our rational idea of humanity's inner purpose is indeed the means by which we aesthetically judge the outer appearance of a person. When we judge someone to be beautiful, in other words, this can only be the result of a harmony having been achieved between inner purposes and outer countenance (against which decorative tattoos, for example, become irrelevant for judgment). What this analysis points to above all is Kant's ongoing effort to discern freedom's appearances in the world, in this case via the embodied human being whose inner virtue and goodness animates their speech, gestures, and overall way of being.

There is a similar conceptual framework in play when discussing our sensible experience of the sublime. For just as the rational idea of moral perfection can be exhibited in its idealized form via the morally beautiful human being, our sensible experience of the sublime also rests on a rational idea, one demanding our attention and respect. As **Rachel Zuckert** analyses Kant's account of the dynamic sublime—the terrifying but also thrilling experience of powerful natural events like earthquakes and volcanoes—what we discover is that this experience is another vehicle by which we might make contact with our intelligible self. In our encounter with the dynamic sublime we inhabit two standpoints, recognizing at once our dual nature as a finite embodied being and as a moral subject invulnerable to nature's power. As she puts it, "the human subject recognizes, indeed feelingly inhabits, her nature as a sensible, vulnerable living being, and yet also the absolute break with—the 'inhibition' and redirection of—such life that comprises her nature as a practically rational being." It is an exhilarating experience, as Kant describes it, and as captured so nicely also in Rudolf Makkreel's formulation: the sublime is "felt instantaneously as a *Lebensgefühl* and judged reflectively as a *Geistesgefühl*."<sup>12</sup> Amidst all this Zuckert is careful to point out that culture plays a structural role in the experience of the sublime, according to Kant, since the rational idea of our moral self is not innate in some kind of Cartesian sense but rather something to be cultivated in us over time (§23, 5:245, §29, 5:264–65). "One must have articulated moral ideas to experience the full, Kantian, meaningful dynamic sublime," Zuckert explains, "because those ideas are not implicitly within or (therefore) 'revealed by'

---

<sup>12</sup> Rudolf A. Makkreel, "Sublimity, Genius and the Explication of Aesthetic Ideas," in *Kants Ästhetik/Kant's Aesthetics/L'esthétique de Kant*, ed. Herman Parret (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 615–29, 622.

the imaginatively thrilling experience. Rather, it is only by *supplying* moral ideas to one's imaginative experience that one can find that experience morally significant."

In Chapter 7 **Robert R. Clewis** takes readers into the heart of the experience of the dynamic sublime, as he teases apart the best way for understanding the mental processes undergirding it; a natural companion to Rachel Zuckert's investigation now that we have the broad outlines in place. Like Zuckert, Clewis opens his discussion with reference to Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime as a precursor to Kant's own interest in it. While Kant ultimately dismisses Burke's theory for its having taken a "physiological" and "psychological" route, Clewis notes Kant's evolution on this point, given his initial willingness to tie the experience to our physiological enhancement. As Kant reportedly put it to students taking his new course on "Anthropology" in 1772, the experience of the sublime both elicits respect and borders on fear ("Anthropologie Parow," 25:388) and can thus be physiologically linked to one's sense of either the promotion or hindering of one's vitality: "regarding the sublime, it unhinges the nerves, and causes pain when it is engaged with forcefully. Indeed, one can bring the sublime to the point of terror and breathlessness" (25:389). By the time Kant is ready to publish his thoughts on the topic, his will be a transcendental account of the conditions underlying the possibility of our experiencing the dynamic sublime at all. Here Clewis is careful to note that while Zuckert and other commentators are certainly correct in identifying the role played by our rational idea of the moral self in the process, it cannot be the case that we must be directly self-reflective for the experience to unfold. "In the experience of the sublime," he explains, "the mind achieves a kind of self-affection, as reason interacts with imagination in aesthetic play. The sensation created by this play may (or could) be observed self-consciously" but it need not be.

In her account of the dynamic sublime Rachel Zuckert comments on the role played by one's culture when it comes to cultivating an awareness of humanity's moral vocation on the one hand, and one's own role as a moral agent bound by the moral law in pursuit of that vocation on the other. It is because of this background requirement, Zuckert explains, that while we might assert that all humans *should* experience the sublime (tied, as it is, to our native respect for the moral law for Kant), we cannot in practice require that everyone would in fact do so (§29, 5:265). This is the point in Kant's account where **Dilek Huseyinzadegan** wants to begin her own investigation. For as her analysis shows, Kant's exposition of the sublime, while meant to demonstrate what should at least in theory be a universal human capacity, relies in fact on what Huseyinzadegan identifies as an "anthropological deduction" and thus ties Kant's account much more closely to the older discussion in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). Kant, in her words, "is not explaining the way in which this feeling can relate to its objects a priori, which would amount to a transcendental deduction. Rather, he is showing us that the sublime is acquired through being prepared by previous experience and through reflection on one's moral purpose—which is how he defines an empirical deduction (A85/B117)." For Huseyinzadegan, this means that Kant's account of the sublime is not universal but indeed parochial, an account of how only certain people can experience it. This "corrupts the transcendental nature of the judgments of the sublime and shows that the modality of these judgments is contingency: they depend on a kind of culture that understands morality to be a function of freedom, where supersensible ideas constitute the basis of the feeling of the sublime." What does this all mean? As Dilek Huseyinzadegan sees it, it "means that cultural, ethnic, or racial judgments continue to play a central role in the formation of Kant's, and by extension, modern aesthetic theory."

In Chapter 9 **Rodolphe Gasché** pays close attention to the way in which “community” takes on a key role in the third *Critique*. Positioning aesthetic judgment as something that is intrinsically interwoven with others, Gasché explains that “the prefix *Bei-* in *Beistimmung*, *Beitritt*, or *Beifall*, clearly emphasizes that what is demanded, or solicited, of others is to join the one who judges through assent” since “all these terms with the prefix *Bei-* imply that others are expected and asked to come together not only in approval of the judgment, but to enter into a relation with the judging subject intent on forming on this occasion a sort of community.” What underlies the possibility of this demand or solicitation? For Kant, “common sense” emerges as the transcendental condition for the possibility of communicability and thus serves as the a priori basis upon which the universality of aesthetic judgments can be made, judgments that in turn provide the basis for our call to others. In Gasché’s words, “life in community with others is the horizon with respect to which a judgment of taste is uttered, and which by appealing to a communal consent of others also furthers life together.” Here, however, Gasché is careful to distinguish Kant’s precise notion of a “sensus communis” from the “common understanding” invoked by thinkers associated with the Scottish Enlightenment. Indeed, it is telling, Gasché insists, that Kant shifts his terminology from the German *Gemeinsinn* to first, the Latin *sensus communis* in §40, and then to *gemeinschaftlich* (communal) in his analysis, since it reveals Kant’s intentions on this point. Kant’s *sensus communis* is not concerned with the senses any more than it is with the common: “It is only through a (negative) relation to others in which one occupies the place of others by stripping one’s own judgment from everything private, hence from everything non-communicable and non-universalizable, that one puts oneself in the place of others. As a result of such abstraction, one’s judgment demonstrates communal sense.” And this communal sense, Gasché argues, is part of what makes us human. “The *sensus communis* as an idea of life,” he emphasizes, “is one of being alive mentally, of being together in spiritual fashion, the pleasure of which is the only that suits human beings as human beings and is as such universally communicable.”

Like Courtney Fugate, **Rudolf Makkreel** is interested in thinking about why there is much more time devoted to describing the life of the mental faculties in play during aesthetic judgment than one would expect Kant to have spent on accounting for our experience of the life all around us in the natural world. In order to answer this question Makkreel starts with a short review of Kant’s shifting notion of life across his works before taking up the difference in Kant’s account of cognition between the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment* with respect to the imagination. Focusing on the discussion of “magnitude” in the two works allows him to get to Kant’s later account of the mathematically sublime. In the third *Critique* “the displeasure of being perceptually frustrated by a great magnitude now impels our imagination to feelingly project the ‘whole vocation of the mind’ (§27, 5:259),” he explains. “The ordinary sense-based and gathering mode of ‘comprehension’ [*Zusammenfassung*] of the imagination is replaced with a felt flash-like ‘comprehension’ [*Comprehension*] that opens up the supersensible potential of the life of the mind.” This account of comprehension reveals its centrality for understanding Kant’s ultimate approach to organic life, for according to Makkreel, reflective comprehension is the means by which we can anticipate an internal, adaptive “reciprocity” at work in nature: “it provides a source of orientation to supplement our *determinate* understanding of the mechanisms of nature with what will be shown to be an *indeterminate* reflective comprehension of organic reciprocity.” What does such reciprocity entail? Here Makkreel appeals first to Kant’s description of *Gegenbildung* as one of the formative functions of the imagination, since it is *Gegenbildung* that allows the imagination to generate analogies, that is, “to discern symbolic rather than



literal counter-parts in different contexts.” With this method we identify internal purposiveness as an adaptive and reciprocal activity at work in an organism and we do so in a way that avoids reliance on mechanical *causality*. Pointing instead to the relational category of *community*—and responding thereby to Ginsborg’s critique of Kant’s seeming reliance on an argument from design—Makkreel argues that “what especially characterizes organic purposiveness for Kant is the internal purposiveness among its various organs. This involves an organizational adaptation that need not be governed by the normative oughts associated with design.” Indeed, “there is something pre-fixed or static about completing a design, which goes against the self-modificatory powers of an organism.” The intrinsic natural perfection of an organism (§65, 5:375), according to Kant, is thus best understood via reflective comprehension to be “a self-modifying and adaptive perfection in which different co-existing contextual forces converge and intersect.”

**Susan Shell**’s account of the state moves the discussion away from the mental grounds of our sense for communal life toward an analysis of Kant’s work to reimagine the political community as a whole. Tracking Kant’s emerging view, Shell is convinced that the language used by Kant when describing the organism—that is, as a system best understood to be an organized and self-organizing being—is similarly working as a model in Kant’s approach to the state. There is indeed a long history of political theorists from Thomas Hobbes to Burke to Johann Gottfried Herder using organic imagery when dissecting the body politic, and Shell opens with a brief rehearsal before settling on the importance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau for Kant’s own formulation, paying close attention in particular to the insights gleaned from his reading of *Émile*. In the wake of this Shell remarks on the significance of Kant’s appeal to “autonomy” in 1785’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, arguing that with this new concept Kant “adds a refining element to his account of the formation, misformation and transformation (*Bildung*, *Missbildung*, and *Umbildung*) of the body politic.” From here we see Kant increasingly torn between two kinds of models. On the one hand, and in a nod towards Rousseau’s description of the “general will” which unifies the body politic from within, Kant offers his readers a view of the state according to which: “a monarchical state is represented by an ensouled body, if it is governed by the inner laws of the people, and a mere machine (like a hand-mill) if governed by an individual absolute will” (§59, 5:352). On the other hand, Kant is excited by the possibilities for thinking about the body politic in light of the American experiment unfolding abroad. Having fought off a despotic will imposed on them “mechanically” by King George, the colonists created a whole new kind of constitution. In this version of the state, as Kant described it, “each member should freely serve in such a whole not merely as a means but also and at the same time as an end, co-effecting the possibility of the whole, the idea of which, in turn, determines each with respect to both place and function” (§65, 5:375n). This was something different: it was the state as a self-organizing being versus something animated but also led by the monarch as entelechy. Shell goes on to look at Kant’s use of terms like “paternal soil” when describing land or “maternal womb” for the commonwealth, before closing with the fresh difficulties facing Kant in the wake of Burke’s successful critique of the French Revolution and the Terror that followed. Despite these, Kant was unwilling to entirely abandon the American model, working instead to understand the means by which a people might work to improve their systems of self-governance.

While many of the contributions to this volume have made reference to Kant’s account of our feeling of the furtherance of life as a result of the free play of the imagination and the understanding during aesthetic judgement, **Michael Olson** reminds readers that Kant spent time as well on the invigorating effect of this free play on our bodily feeling of health.

As Olson puts it, for Kant, “games of chance, music, and witty conversation each engender a free play of sensations reminiscent of the free play of the imagination and the understanding in judgments of beauty.” But even if these are embodied sensations and are thus in some sense downgraded in comparison to the “disinterested” pleasure to be had in one’s encounter with the beautiful, Kant seems to have recognized that their existence marks a pivot point between aesthetic and teleological reflection. In this way health takes on a liminal character for Kant, from an initial mediation between our mental quickening and the body’s enhanced physiological well-being, to serving as the structural hinge between the two parts of Kant’s analysis. Citing Rudolf Makkreel on this point, Olson explains that “having brought life to the level of bodily health we are now ready to observe the transition in the *Critique of Judgment* from the aesthetical to the teleological.” With this in mind, Olson returns readers to Kant’s early career, demonstrating Kant’s long standing interest in questions regarding health, disease, and the ways in which not just pleasure but pain too increases our feelings of the promotion of life, in investigations spanning 1767’s *Essays on the Maladies of the Head* to Kant’s late endorsement of John Brown’s theory of health and illness in 1798’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Returning at last to the third *Critique*, Olson examines Kant’s comments in §54 against the backdrop of his contemporaneous lectures on anthropology. “The feeling of health Kant associates with agreeable experiences like lively conversation and hearing a good joke is not a feeling of a stable state of health,” he tells us, “it is rather the gratification that results from promoting life by agitating the organs, which brings us closer to the ideal equilibrium of health. In other words, what Kant glosses with the phrase ‘feeling of health’ in the *Critique of Judgment* is actually a kind of shorthand for ‘feeling of the promotion of life and a return to health’.”

In “Kant and Organic Life,” **Joan Steigerwald** investigates Kant’s significance for life science theorists in the lead up to what would become the field of biology. Contending that Kant’s importance lay not in his particular solutions to the questions surrounding generation, reproduction, and inheritance, Steigerwald argues instead that it was the compelling way in which Kant formulated the problems facing such inquiries that opened up possible routes for investigations by scientists and writers coming after him. Thus it was Kant’s “conception of the self-organizing capacities of organized beings and his reflections on the judgments productive of that conception in the *Critique of Judgment*,” she explains, “it was this conception of the reciprocity of means and ends, of cause and effect, as characteristic of organic life that was cited repeatedly by naturalists, physiologists and philosophers attempting to develop a science of life at the turn of the nineteenth century.” Now why is it the case, Steigerwald asks, that we have an account of organic life in a book about judgment as opposed to one about nature? It’s a good question and much of the chapter is spent on its answer. In short, Kant’s account of organisms is one modelled on the activities of *judgment* and is therefore more about us than it can ever be about anything else. The kinds of judgments we make about organisms “out there,” moreover, are singularly reflective of our own way of thinking about them “in here.” Kant “argued that we arrive at the concept of natural purpose only through the activity of judgment as it reflects on our empirical investigations of organisms and their possible conceptualization. Moving between theoretical cognition and practical reason, yet unable to settle in either, critically reflecting on the concepts of natural mechanism and concepts of rational purpose, neither of which provides a determinate grasp of organisms, we arrive at the indeterminate concept of natural purposes.” And this concept, according to Steigerwald, sets up a parallel between the activity of judging and the object of this judgement. “In closely considering the self-organizing capacities of organized beings and reflecting on the modes of judgment through which we attempt to make

sense of these capacities, Kant concluded that both are guided by thinking in terms of reciprocal means and ends or causes and effects.” With this much established, Steigerwald spends the rest of the chapter briefly tracing Kant’s influence in this vein on Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Carl Friedrich Kielmeyer Kielmeyer.

In her contribution to the volume **Felicitas Munzel** takes up Kant’s turn toward moral teleology in the final sections of the *Critique of Judgment*, asking how we might best understand Kant’s approach towards moral life. Kant’s well known distinction between heteronomy and autonomy has created the impression of a sharp division between the realm of feeling and the moral law, but Munzel opens her discussion with a reminder that Kant deliberately scheduled his ethics lectures to run during the semesters when he taught anthropology since, as he had explained already in 1785’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, anthropology was simply the empirical counterpart to ethics; in his words, “morality requires anthropology for its application to human beings” (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 4:412). What does this mean? As Munzel reconstructs his discussion from the *Critique of Practical Reason* to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, she argues that Kant’s account of the feeling of life finds in fact its most realized presentation in the discussion of our aptitude for “personality,” i.e., in the human capacity to behave as a morally accountable person whose motives are led by a rational embrace of the moral law. As she summarizes Kant’s path at one point, “understanding moral feeling as an aesthetic concept that is of a piece with the feeling of the sublime that, in turn, yields an intense feeling of the promotion of life, allows one to better comprehend the full import of Kant’s identification of moral feeling as ‘morality itself, subjectively regarded’ (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:62).” This moral feeling—or “moral vital force” as he describes it in the *Metaphysics of Morals*—must be cultivated, according to Kant, for as he puts it: “it is of great importance to draw attention to this attribute of our personality and to cultivate as best as one can, the effect of reason on this feeling” (5:117). Munzel’s is a rich discussion and a perfect ending to the volume, opening as it does onto the next stage of Kant’s thoughts on the cultivated feelings of an embodied but morally positioned human life.

\*\*\*

The idea for this volume grew out of conversations with Rudolf Makkreel in 2016. Rudi Makkreel was a meticulous and original scholar and philosopher, as well as a devoted teacher and mentor, who did much to call attention to the radicality and reach of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. As this volume came together, Makkreel’s presence and importance for the topic was undeniable; a number of the contributors to this volume were Rudi’s students, friends, and colleagues, and all of us knew him through professional circles as well. He was especially delighted by the idea of the volume’s focus on the concept of life, having devoted a chapter to the issue in his book *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the “Critique of Judgment”* (University of Chicago Press, 1990). This volume demonstrates that his insights have contributed to many of the most compelling interpretations of Kant’s third *Critique*, and this is felt throughout the text.

Sadly, Rudolf Makkreel passed away after a relatively brief illness in the Fall of 2021 and I am sorry that he missed not just this book’s publication, but that of his own book as well, *Kant’s Worldview: How Judgment Shapes Human Contribution* (Northwestern University Press, 2021). The North American Kant Society hosted a memorial session to him in 2022 and as a virtual event many of us were able to speak for a few minutes, sharing favourite memories and our gratitude toward him as a mentor and friend. Rudolf Makkreel is perhaps best known as a Dilthey scholar, having translated, and edited, with Frithjof Rodi,

*Kant and the Feeling of Life: Beauty and Nature in Kant's Critique of Judgment*, edited by Jennifer Mensch (Albany: SUNY Press, 2024).

Wilhelm Dilthey's selected works for an English-speaking audience. He was, however, broadly interested in hermeneutics and taught and published on each of the major figures associated with that tradition. It was in this way that Makkreel had a foot also in Continental philosophy discussions, and a memorial session was held in honour of him at the meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy in 2022. People who knew Rudi appreciated his patience and generosity of spirit, the twinkle in his eyes at a good story or funny joke, his sweet tooth, and his love of Renée Fleming and the transporting beauty of her voice. We will miss him, and this volume is dedicated to him on behalf of all his students and friends.

*Jennifer Mensch*  
*Western Sydney University*