

# Kant's Transcendental Definition of Pleasure and Displeasure

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## Abstract:

This essay explores the meaning of Kant's transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure. I will explain the meaning of "definition" and "transcendental" respectively in relation to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, contrasting with the interpretations of Guyer (2018) and Deimling (2018). Not only will I show how they are wrong, but I will also offer reasons for their misinterpretations. This essay proposes that the transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure bears more systematic significance in Kant's philosophy than previous researchers might have thought. My analysis also leads back to Kant's conception of the anthropological relation between life, desire, and pleasure.

## Key words:

Transcendental; Definition; Feeling of pleasure and displeasure; Life; Desire

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# 1 Introduction

In the First Book of the *Critique of Power of Judgement*, Kant claims that the power of judgement contains *a priori* principle for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. His general idea is that we feel pleasure or displeasure in the experience of the beautiful or of the sublime and we necessarily expect others to consent with our feelings. This requirement of universality and necessity distinguishes the aesthetic experience of the beautiful and the sublime from the experience of private agreeableness. It further reveals that a special kind of reflective judgement is at work to determine our faculty of feeling. The determining principle is Kant's well-known *a priori* principle of subjective purposiveness. While previous studies have concentrated on the cognitive side—that is, on the characters of this special kind of reflective judgement<sup>1</sup>, recent studies on the third *Critique* have shifted the attention to the feeling side—that is, on Kant's depiction of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. The interest in Kant's theory of feeling also corresponds to a broader academic project of defending against the stereotypical understanding of Kant: that feelings only have a negative place in Kant's philosophy. The positive role of moral feelings in Kant's ethics is now a well-established topic<sup>2</sup>, while Kant's theory of pleasure and displeasure still remains under-developed.<sup>3</sup>

Some Kantian scholars, who turn their attention to Kant's theory of pleasure and displeasure, have noticed that in the First Introduction of the third *Critique*, Kant offers "a transcendental definition" of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. The phrase "transcendental definition" is a combination of two

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- 1 For a systematic analysis on Kant's account of judgement in *the Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, see Longuenesse, B. (1998). *Kant and the Capacity to Judge: sensibility and discursivity in the transcendental analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*: Princeton University Press.
  - 2 For studies on Kant's moral feeling, see Falduto, A. (2014). *The Faculties of the Human Mind and the Case of Moral Feeling in Kant's Philosophy* (Vol. 177). Also see DeWitt, J. (2014). Respect for the Moral Law: the Emotional Side of Reason. *Philosophy*, 89(1): 31-62.
  - 3 Although Frierson has devoted two studies on the topic of a transcendental critique of feeling, his emphasis is still on how respect as a moral feeling functions in Kant's ethics. See Frierson, P. (2016). Towards a Transcendental Critique of Feeling. *Con-Textos Kantianos*, 3, 381-390; Frierson, P. (2016). Kantian Feeling: Empirical Psychology, Transcendental Critique, and Phenomenology. *Con-Textos Kantianos*, 3: 353-371.

difficult terms in Kant's philosophy: "transcendental" and "definition". Each of these two words can either obtain a more serious meaning referring to Kant's entire transcendental idealism, or they can be read as less serious and therefore obtain a loose meaning within its context. In the case of the transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure, Deimling (2018) presses the systematic meaning of "transcendental" and suggests a loose understanding of "definition". On the contrary, Guyer (2018) interprets "transcendental" only as "abstract" but regards this account as a full-fledged definition of pleasure and displeasure.

I am sympathetic to Deimling's interpretation, that Kant is consistent in his word of choice "transcendental" and is less cautious with his use of "definition". However, my reading diverges with Deimling, as well as Guyer, in the details. While Deimling believes that the transcendental definition indicates a transcendental relation between feeling and desire *a priori*, my analysis will show that it can only refer to a transcendental relation between feeling and cognition *a priori*. My strategy is of two directions. First I would narrow down this transcendental definition to its context, so as to understand Kant's intention of introducing it at that exact point. Secondly, I would broaden the view to Kant's entire philosophy, so as to discover the genesis of this transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure.

To elaborate on the divergence, I would first start with introducing the context of Kant's transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure in section 2. In section 3, I would proceed to explain Kant's attitude towards philosophical definition and refute Guyer's reading. In section 4, I will explore the meaning and the function of "transcendental" in this account and refute Deimling's reading. In section 5, I will demonstrate the possibility of a transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure. I will conclude with the significance of the study on the transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure in section 6.

## **2 Kant's Transcendental Definition and its Context**

### **2.1 The transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure**

The most widely quoted passage for Kant's transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure locates in the unpublished first draft of the introduction

to the *Critique of Power of the Judgement*, also known as the First Introduction. There Kant states:

An explanation (Erklärung) of this feeling considered in general, **without regard to the distinction whether it accompanies sensation, reflection or the determination of the will**, must be transcendental. It can go like this: **Pleasure** is a **state** of the mind in which a representation is in agreement with itself, as a ground, either merely for preserving this state itself (for the state of the powers of the mind reciprocally promoting each other in a representation preserves itself), or for producing its object. (AK 20:230-231).

And in the footnote of this passage, Kant adds that:

It is useful to attempt a transcendental definition (eine transzendente Definition) of concepts which are used as empirical principles, if one has cause to suspect that they have kinship with the pure faculty of cognition *a priori* (AK 20:230).

Before we proceed to the meaning of "transcendental" and "definition", it is important to introduce the context of the quoted passage. The transcendental definition of pleasure appears in the remark of § 8 of the First Introduction, entitled "On the aesthetic of the faculty of judging". In § 8, Kant first proposes that the judgement of taste contains a special kind of reflective judgement which pertains not to the cognition of objects, but to "a relation of the two faculties of cognition which constitutes the subjective, merely sensitive condition of the objective use of the power of judgement in general (namely the agreement of those two faculties with each other)." (20:223-224). This agreement between two faculties is then designated as "subjective purposiveness" (20:224-225) and "is combined with the feeling of pleasure" (20:224).

Kant then adds that "an aesthetic judgement is that whose determining ground lies in a sensation that is immediately connected with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure." (20:224). So the feeling of pleasure and displeasure enters into the picture as an aesthetic determination of the aesthetic judgement. To be more exact, this determining relationship between feeling and judging only means that the feeling of pleasure and displeasure points us to the existence

of a special kind of judgement about the subjective condition of human minds.<sup>4</sup>

In the following Remark of § 8, Kant refuses to "elucidate the explanation of pleasure as the sensible representation of the **perfection** of an object" (20:226)<sup>5</sup>. His intention is to distinguish his concept of subjective purposiveness from the traditional framework of perfection: the concept of perfection is "an ontological concept" (20:228) that requires the correspondence between the object and a particular concept and "has not the least to do with the feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (20:228), while the subjective purposiveness pertains to the correspondence of mental faculties and can even be "fundamentally identical with the feeling of pleasure" (20:230).

Right after this, Kant offers us his transcendental definition of pleasure. If we trace this track of thought backwards, we can see that this transcendental definition of pleasure is introduced to support Kant's refusal of explaining pleasure by the concept of perfection. The concept of perfection is introduced to contrast with the concept of subjective purposiveness, and the subjective purposiveness can be further traced back to the mechanism of aesthetic judgement of reflection. So, without digging into the real meaning of "transcendental", we can readily see that there is a close connection between the faculty of feeling and the faculty of judging. When Kant says in the footnote that one has reason to suspect the concept of pleasure to "have kinship with the pure faculty of cognition *a priori*" (FI, 20:230), the pure faculty of cognition *a priori* refers to the faculty of judgement, not the faculty of desire as Deimling (2018) suggests.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2 The symmetry between pleasure and displeasure

I want to clarify a confusion that might arise from the previously quoted passage. Up till now, I've been treating the feeling of pleasure and displeasure as analogous, namely what applies to pleasure can be (oppositely) applied to dis-

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4 It is crucial to point out that the determining relationship between feeling and judging here should not be understood as the feeling containing an *a priori* principle for the faculty of judgement, but quite the opposite. Kant's intension of the first half the third *Critique* is to show that the faculty of judgement contains *a priori* principle for the faculty of feeling. I will later come back to this point.

5 As Guyer points out in his editorial notes: "Here Kant refers to the account of aesthetic response and judgements of taste developed by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Christian Wolff, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, and Georg Friedrich Meier" (Guyer, 2000:360).

6 This is where my reading diverges from Deimling's interpretation. I will elaborate on this point when talking about the determining relationship between feeling and judging in section 4.

pleasure. One may question the legitimacy of this strategy, for in the quoted passage Kant only mentions a transcendental definition of pleasure, not pleasure and displeasure. This is not a trivial point since there have always been debates about the symmetry between pleasure and displeasure, both within the context of Kantian philosophy and in contemporary philosophy of mind. For example, scholars who hold a symmetry-view require a Kantian theory of ugliness based on displeasure, mimicking to Kant's theory of beauty based on pleasure; those who don't hold the symmetry-view would not make this attempt or even refute the possibility of it.<sup>7</sup> For my current purpose, I only want to defend a basic thesis, that Kant's transcendental account of pleasure and displeasure are symmetrical. Although he does not mention displeasure in this passage, he deals with it in other passages. In § 10 of the published third *Critique*, Kant first offers us an explanation of pleasure similar to the aforementioned transcendental definition, and then he adds an explanation of displeasure as a contrast. There Kant says:

The consciousness of the causality of a representation with respect to the state of the subject, for maintaining it in that state, can here designate in general what is called pleasure; in contrast to which displeasure is that representation that contains the ground for determining the state of the representations to their own opposite (hindering or getting rid of them). (CJ, 5:220).

In this passage, the key element of pleasure is the maintenance of the mental state and the key element of displeasure is the hindrance of the mental state. Regardless of what Kant really means by these terms, these two accounts do look symmetrical. Hence, we can find transcendental definitions both for pleasure and displeasure within the range of the third *Critique*. Since I've clarified this confusion, I can now proceed to explicate the significance of Kant's "transcendental definition" of pleasure and displeasure.

### 3 The "Definition" of Pleasure and Displeasure

Since "transcendental definition" is a combination of two difficult terms:

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<sup>7</sup> For debates about Kant's theory of ugliness, see the interlocution between Shier and Wenzel. See Shier, D. (1998). Why Kant finds Nothing Ugly. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 38(4): 412-418. Wenzel, C. (1999). Kant finds Nothing Ugly?. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 39(4): 416-422.

"transcendental" and "definition", it is helpful to explicate the meaning of these two terms in Kant's philosophy respectively. Of course, the actual meaning of the term always depends on its context, so I will inevitably relate the meaning of "transcendental" and "definition" back to the context in question: the explanation of pleasure and displeasure "in relation to pure faculty of cognition *a priori*" (AA, 20:230). Furthermore, since the meaning of the predicate also changes according to the noun it qualifies, I will first start with the noun "definition" and then proceed to the predicate "transcendental".

### 3.1 Kant's "definition"

First and foremost, I need to point out that a transcendental "definition" of pleasure and displeasure can never be a full-fledged definition in a strict sense. Kant is quite pessimistic about philosophical definitions in general. For Kant, to define means "to exhibit originally the exhaustive concept of a thing within its boundaries" (CPR, A727/B755). This standard can be dissected into three key requirements: exhaustive, original, and within the boundaries. In the footnote, Kant further explains that "exhaustive" signifies "clarity" and "sufficiency", "boundaries" signifies "precision", and "originally" means it is not derived from other presumptions. (CPR, A727/B755) Concepts, as the targets of definitions, can be divided into two kinds: empirical concepts and *a priori* concepts. Kant regards neither empirical concepts nor *a priori* concepts as fully definable. To be more specific, two kinds of concepts fail to obtain Kantian definitions by different requirements. The reason is that these two kinds of concepts hold different relations with their objects. In the *Blomberg Logic* (the student note of Kant's lectures on logic), Kant says that "[i]n the case of empirical concepts, the things outside us, about which we judge, are the *exemplaria*, and our concepts are the *exemplata*. In the case of pure concepts, however, the concepts themselves are the *exemplaria*, and those things of which we have the concepts are the *exemplata*". (BL, 24:124)

For *a priori* concepts, they fail the requirement of "exhaustiveness":

[S]trictly speaking no concept given *a priori* can be defined, e.g., substance, cause, right, equity, etc. For I can never be certain that the distinct representation of a (still confused) given concept has been exhaustively developed unless I know that it is adequate to the object. (CPR, A728/B756)

From this passage we can see that Kant's example of *a priori* concepts are of two kinds: the concepts of "substance" and "cause" belong to the categories of understanding; the concepts of "right" and "equity" belong to the ideas of

morality, originating from the reason. Since these concepts originate either from understanding or from reason, we can conclude that neither of them arise from external objects. This is the mark of *a priori* concepts. As Kant's argument goes, we cannot find an external object that is fully adequate to this concept, let alone exhausting all objects that are adequate to this concepts. Of course, one can create a concept from one's mind and then arbitrary define it, but in Kant's theory this can only happen in mathematics. As long as the given concepts are to be applied to the empirical world, the tentative definitions of them would fail the requirement of exhaustiveness.

For empirical concepts, they fail the requirement of "within the boundary":

Given such a requirement, an **empirical** concept cannot be defined at all but only explicated. For since we have in it only some marks of a certain kind of objects of the senses, it is never certain whether by means of the word that designates the same object one does not sometimes think more of these marks but another time fewer of them. (CPR, A726/B755)

At the first sight, Kant's reason for the indefinability of empirical concepts seems quite trivial and unconvincing: the same person might use the same word to designate different meanings at different times. Admittedly, the ambiguity of the use of concepts is a common, or even inevitable, phenomenon of human language, but it does not directly proof that these concepts cannot be defined. However, Kant's latter example of the empirical concept of "gold" shows that the point is not about one's particular use of the word, but about one's general knowledge of the object the word refers to. Kant says:

Thus in the concept of gold one person might think, besides its weight, color, and ductility, its property of not rusting, while another might *know* nothing about this. One makes use of certain marks only as long as they are sufficient for making distinctions; *new observations*, however, take some away and add some, and therefore the concept never remains within secure boundaries. (CPR, A728/B756; emphasis added).

In this example, the emphasis is no more on the use of the word, but on the possible knowledge of the object. Since empirical concepts arise from the empirical objects, the boundaries of these concepts have to change according to our knowledge of them.

### 3.2 Definition of pleasure and displeasure

Besides the point that Kant doubts our capability to give definitions in gen-



eral, he is even more suspicious about the adequacy of our explanation of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure in particular. Kant repetitively states that we are incapable of explaining pleasure and displeasure on its own. In the First Introduction, Kant states that:

It can be readily seen here that pleasure or displeasure, since they are not kinds of cognition, cannot be explained by themselves at all, and are felt, not understood; hence they can be only *inadequately* explained through the influence that a representation has on the activity of the powers of the mind by means of this feeling. (20:232; emphasis added)

Kant reiterates this point later in his *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797):

Pleasure and displeasure express nothing at all in the object but simply a relation to the subject. For this very reason pleasure and displeasure cannot be explained more clearly in themselves; instead, one can *only specify* what *results* they have in certain circumstances, so as to make them recognizable in practice. (MM, 6:212; emphasis added)

Kant's position is clear. We cannot define pleasure and displeasure because, as feelings, they are fundamentally subjective. "They are felt, not understood". If we want to explain the feeling of pleasure and displeasure to someone who has never felt this feeling before, then this definition is not adequate. So the use of this definition is not to make people understand the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, but to help us to "recognize" different instances of pleasure and displeasure. For example, in the first half of the third *Critique*, Kant's main target is one's pleasure in the beautiful. His intention is not to introduce a new kind of pleasure—the disinterested pleasure—to his audience; on the contrary, he assumes that all readers have had encountered the beautiful and therefore have experienced this special kind of pleasure. The task of the critique is thus to explicate the possibility of grounding this pleasure in the faculty of judgement.

### 3.3 The phenomenology of pleasure and displeasure

Kant's emphasis on pleasure and displeasure "being felt, not understood" indicates that for Kant, the feelings of pleasure and displeasure have irreducible phenomenological characters that cannot be fully captured by the concepts of understanding. This would lead us to the phenomenology-disposition demarcation proposed by Guyer (2018).

As I've mentioned in the Introduction, Guyer (2018) regards the transcendental account of pleasure and displeasure as a true definition. To prove

this point, Guyer even turns to *Anthropology Mrongovius* (student notes of Kant's lecture on anthropology) where Kant states that "Every discomfort or pain requires us to leave our present condition, and this is its definition (Definition)." (AK, 25: 1316). Guyer stresses that here Kant uses "Definition" rather than "Erklärung" (Guyer, 2018:158) and he believes that this proves that Kant regards this account as a true definition. At first sight, Guyer's argument is quite vulnerable, for I've shown that Kant is generally pessimistic towards philosophical definition and especially towards an adequate definition of pleasure and displeasure. Kant's use of "definition" could just be a wrong choice of word. If so, why bother give a lengthy analysis of Kant's theory of definition?

However, Guyer's reason for holding this point is more sophisticated than it seems to be; it has close connection with Guyer's phenomenological-dispositional demarcation. Guyer (2018) suggests that Kant has actually provided two models for explaining pleasure and displeasure: a phenomenological model regarding how pleasure and displeasure feel; a dispositional model regarding the activities of different mental faculties. By identifying the transcendental account of pleasure and displeasure as a real definition, what Guyer really wants to achieve is to establish the dispositional model as the fundamental model to explain pleasure and displeasure.

I think Guyer is right on one point, namely the transcendental definition in question excludes the phenomenological characters of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. However, this does not prove that the transcendental definition is adequate; on the contrary, I want to suggest that this exclusion is exactly why the transcendental account is inadequate to be a definition. Kant has actually mentioned one particular phenomenological character of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure: the subjective experience of time. In 1789 *Anthropology*, Kant says that "the quicker we make time pass, the more we feel refreshed" (7:234), and contrarily we feeling the time passing slower when in pain or displeasure. This phenomenological character is logically consistent with Kant's transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure. As the transcendental definition says, that pleasure is the maintenance of the mental state, it can explain why we feel the time shorter in pleasure. For if we remain in a certain mental state and don't want to leave that state, we will not notice the objective passing of time and therefore subjectively feel the time shorter. Similarly if displeasure is the urge to leave the current state, it explains why we feel the time

longer in displeasure.

The reason I mention the phenomenology of pleasure and displeasure as well as Guyer's two models is to show that although Kant is very explicit on his attitude towards definition, different interpreters would still make efforts to press the seriousness of his use of "definition" for their own exegetic purposes. In the case of pleasure and displeasure, it is crucial to give credit to the phenomenology of these two feelings in order to stay cautious towards the word "definition".

## 4 Kant's "Transcendental"

After I've shown that "definition" in question should only be understood as an explanation pointing to the "transcendental" dimension of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, it is time to explicate the meaning of "transcendental".

### 4.1 A brief explanation of "transcendental"

I shall first briefly clarify the general meaning of the predicate "transcendental" in Kant's transcendental idealism. In the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), Kant elucidates the meaning of "transcendental" against a possible misinterpretation. There he says that

[T]he word: transcendental – whose signification, which I indicated so many times, was not once caught by the reviewer (so hastily had he looked at everything) – does not signify something that surpasses all experience, but something that indeed precedes experience (*a priori*), but that, all the same, is destined to nothing more than solely to make cognition from experience possible. (*Prolegomena*, 4:373-374, footnote).

So the misinterpretation of "transcendental" regards this word as signifying something beyond the empirical world and is therefore detached from all possible experience. On the contrary, Kant points out that the only legitimate use of "transcendental" is to signify something that helps us to form cognition out of experience therefore it cannot be detached from experience. There is always an indispensable linkage between the empirical world and the transcendental cognitions.

What vehicles can carry us from an empirical object up to a transcendental cognition of it? Kant answers this question in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he "call[s] all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects

but rather with our *a priori* concepts of objects in general" (CPR, A:12). So the key elements of transcendental cognitions are the *a priori* concepts, i.e. twelve categories of pure understanding. Here, one might notice a possible contradiction: on the one hand, as previously mentioned, the use of transcendental cognitions cannot be detached from experience; on the other hand, the concepts composing these transcendental cognitions originate from our understanding. If we regard the empirical world as external to us and the faculty of understanding as internal to us, then the tension between two statements results from explaining the external world in terms of internal concepts. However, this is exactly the spirit of Kant's transcendental idealism: the *a priori* concepts are the conditions of possible experience.

Of course, Kant then expands his application of this predicate to other nouns. In *A Kant Dictionary* (2009), Caygill concludes that "[t]he term transcendental is used ubiquitously to qualify nouns such as logic, aesthetic, unit of apperception, faculties, illusions; in each case it signals that the noun it qualifies is being considered in terms of its conditions of possibility" (2009:399). Although Caygill has mentioned a list of nouns "transcendental" can qualify, he has not clarified what it means to be a "transcendental definition" and this is the problem waiting for an investigation.

#### **4.2 The meaning of "transcendental" in the context**

The exact meaning of "transcendental" can be pinned down by what it contrasts with. In the context of the third *Critique*, Kant often compares his "transcendental" investigation in contrast to physiology. In "General remark on the exposition of aesthetic reflective judgements" of the third *Critique*, Kant states that

The *transcendental exposition* of aesthetic judgements that has now been completed can be compared with the *physiological exposition*, as it has been elaborated by Burke and many acute men among us, in order to see whither a merely *empirical exposition* of the sublime and the beautiful would lead. (CJ, 5: 277; emphasis added)

In this quote, Kant mentions Edmund Burke, the author of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Although Burke is renowned as the first author to offer a complete study of beauty and sublime, Kant nonetheless regards him as only taking a physiological path. For Kant, Burke's physiological method is twofold: first Burke bases his explanation of beauty and sublime entirely on the feeling of love and fear,

without involving any kind of reflective judgement; secondly, Burke bases his explanation of the feeling of love and fear on the movements of bodily vessels—love is "the relaxation, loosening and slackening of the fibers of the body" (CJ, 5: 277) whereas fear is the "cleans[ing of] the finer or cruder vessels of dangerous and burdensome stoppages" (CJ, 5: 277). Although Kant admits that this physiological attempt "provide[s] rich materials for the favourite research of empirical anthropology" (CJ, 5:277), he thinks that this attempt fails to account for the universal assent we expect from the judgement of taste. On the contrary, Kant's transcendental investigation aims to explain the universality and the necessity of this special kind of aesthetic judgement.

Denying physiology does not mean that Kant allows nothing empirical into his transcendental investigation. Like aforementioned section 4.1, Kant's "transcendental" cannot be detached from the empirical world; it aims to explain the condition of our experiences. This sophisticated relation between "transcendental" and "empirical" is crucial for the understanding of the transcendental definition for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. The faculty of feeling is at the bottom receptive, meaning that it is a reaction to certain objects and it needs external stimulus. In the case of moral feeling, the object is the moral law and the feeling of respect is *a priori*. But in the case of the judgement of taste, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure is initiated by the forms of external objects and therefore empirical. Kant repeatedly claims that the feeling of pleasure is "the empirical consciousness of subjective purposiveness" (FI, 20: 227), that an *a priori* principle of the power of judgement would be "buried among the feeling of enjoyment and pain" (CJ, 5:226) if we do not carry out a critique of it and to elevate it into the realm of transcendental philosophy.

How can an empirical feeling of pleasure or displeasure obtain a transcendental definition? At one point, Kant excludes the feeling of pleasure and displeasure from his transcendental explanation. In §10 of CJ, when trying to give a transcendental clarification of the concepts "purpose" and "purposiveness", Kant says that:

If one would clarify (erklären) what an purpose is in accordance with its transcendental determinations (transcendentalen Bestimmungen) (without presupposing anything empirical, such as the feeling of pleasure), then a purpose is the object of a concept insofar as the latter is regarded as the cause of the former (the real ground of its possibility); and the causality of a **concept** with

regard to its **object** is purposiveness (*forma finalis*). (CJ, 5:219-220)

Here we see that Kant excludes the feeling of pleasure from the transcendental determination of purpose. However, excluding the feeling of pleasure and displeasure as an *explanans* does not mean it cannot be an *explanandum*. So pleasure and displeasure's being empirical is not a valid reason to deny the possibility of their transcendental definitions. Quite the opposite, it is exactly because the feeling of pleasure and displeasure is commonly used as an empirical principle in our daily life that Kant thinks "[i]t is useful to attempt a transcendental definition" (FI, 20:230).

#### 4.3 The function of the transcendental definition

Many scholars are satisfied with this "usefulness" to explain the significance of the transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure. To be more specific, Guyer (2018) regards "transcendental" in the definition of pleasure only as "abstract" (2018:149) and Allison (2001) regards the "transcendental" in the definition of purpose as only "generic" (2001:121). However, just as "useful" is not useful enough, "abstract" is too abstract to explicate the important role of this transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure.

I want to propose a more detailed reading of the usefulness of a transcendental definition. The significance should be divided into two dimensions: 1. negatively, a transcendental account helps us to avoid false assumptions based on empirical observations; 2. positively, it shows us the possibility of finding an *a priori* principle for the *explanandum*. Kant's use of this predicate is consistent among his later works, including the second *Critique* (1788), the third *Critique* (1790) and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (17987). In the Preface of *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant, once again, provides an explanation of the feeling of pleasure similar to the transcendental definition of pleasure in *Critique of Power of Judgement*. He then adds that:

It is easily seen that the question whether pleasure must always be put at the basis of the faculty of desire or whether under certain conditions pleasure only follows upon its determination, is left undecided by this exposition; *for it is composed only of marks belonging to the pure understanding, i. e., categories*, which contain nothing empirical. Such a precaution - namely, *not to anticipate one's judgements by definitions* ventured before complete analysis of the concept, which is often achieved very late - is to be highly recommended throughout philosophy, and yet is often neglected. (CPrR, 5:9; emphasis added)

The falsely anticipated judgement in this context is the common assumption that pleasure is the determination of the faculty of desire. Kant's precaution is thus to provide a transcendental account of pleasure that only includes the categories of pure understanding. To be more exact, he applies the relation of cause and effect, namely the category "causality" in the transcendental definition. In the transcendental definition of pleasure in the First Introduction, Kant provides two options about the causal relations pleasure can signify. Pleasure is a state of the mind either merely for 1) preserving this state itself or 2) for producing its object. We can see that these two causal relations, in terms of the realms they concern, are different. The first option is limited within the realm of the human mind while the second option requires the causal relationship between the mind and the objective world. Insofar as the explanation of desire always contains a causal relation requiring the reality of external objects, we can say that the latter options concerns with the faculty of desire while the first one doesn't. By involving two options into the definition, Kant successfully avoids making hasty judgements about the relation between pleasure and desire. This is the negative significance of transcendental: to avoid the influence of empirical (false) assumptions.

The positive role of "transcendental" is to explore the kinship between feeling and cognition *a priori*. This role is straightforward and abstruse at the same time. It is straightforward because Kant has repeatedly claims that it is reasonable to suppose a grounding relation between the faculty of judgement and the faculty of feeling. It is at the same time abstruse because few studies have really clarified how the power of judgement can actually determine feelings by its *a priori* principle of subjective purposiveness. As Cohen rightly concludes, this is "Kant's well-known but rarely discussed statement" (Cohen, 2019: 7). <sup>8</sup>I have no ambition to tackle down this complicated issue all at once, but I do want to point out that a controversial point within Kantian scholars about the relation between feeling and judging have already been explained by Kant.

Kantian scholars can be roughly divided into two camps in terms of their views on the structure of Kant's judgement of beauty: the one-act view regards

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8 Also see Nuzzo, A. (2014). The Place of the Emotions in Kant's Transcendental Philosophy, *Kant on Emotion and Value* (88-107): Springer. In this essay, she argues that although Kant regards the faculty of feeling as worthy of an entire separate critique, the place of emotion Kant's transcendental philosophy still remains largely neglected.



the feeling of pleasure as identical to judging, represented by Ginsborg (2003); the two-act view insists that there must be a separate act of judging following the feeling of pleasure, represented by Guyer (1991)<sup>9</sup> To put it simply, the one-act view suggests that we can judge by the feeling; there are no two separated acts of mind. The two-act view believes that we only judge about feeling, so the feeling and judging are essentially separated. Unfortunately, both sides of the debate have failed to notice that Kant has already provided us with exactly these two possible relation between feeling and judging. Again in the First Introduction, right before the introduction of the transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure, Kant says that:

Thus the faculty of aesthetic reflection judges only about the subjective purposiveness (not about the perfection) of the object: and the question arises whether it judges only **by means of** the pleasure or displeasure which is felt in it, or whether it rather judges **about** these, so that the judgement at the same time determines that pleasure or displeasure must be combined with the representation of the object. (FI, 20:229).

So Kant distinguishes two possible relations between the feeling and judging: in the former one, the feeling is in the judgement itself; in later one, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure is regarded as somehow external to the judgement, so that it can be the object of the judgement and be determined by it. Although Kant says right after this passage that "this question cannot yet be adequately decided here" (20: 229), he actually hints on what he chooses. He regards the former option as belonging to the "empirical department" (20:229) whereas the latter one allows the judgement to "carries with it a universality and necessity" (20:229) and therefore requires a transcendental investigation. We can see from this analysis that Kant does hold the two-act view in a certain way. So I agree with Cohen (2019) that the transcendental relation between feeling and

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9 Guyer (2018) has modified the view, but he still insists that there are two act of judgement involved in the entire course of judgement of beauty. For the details about the debate between one-act view and two-act view, see the interlocution between Guyer (2017) and Ginsborg (2017). Guyer, (2017). One Act or Two? Hannah Ginsborg on Aesthetic Judgement. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 57 (4): 407-419. Ginsborg, H. (2017). In Defence of the One-Act View: Reply to Guyer. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 57(4): 421-435. Within the camp of one-act view, there are still divergence about how to understand feeling as identical to judging. See Allison, (2003). Reply to the Comments of Longuenesse and Ginsborg. *Inquiry*, 46(2): 182-194.



judging is that "feelings need to be reflectively interpreted by judgement in order to acquire intentionality" (Cohen, 2019: 5), so that "[j]udgment is thus the transcendental condition of the intentionality of feelings."(Cohen, 2019:7).

## 5 The possibility of a transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure

This section concerns with how Kant generates the transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure. This question can be further divided into two questions: 1) How can Kant form a transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure at the very beginning of the third *Critique*? 2) How does Kant locate the category of causality as the key concept for this transcendental definition? I will argue that the answers to these questions hide in the anthropological relation between life, desire and pleasure.

### 5.1 Desire and pleasure

Given the analysis in section 4, Deimling (2018) is wrong in claiming that Kant uses "transcendental" "because he thinks that we can know about the connection between feeling and desire *a priori*." (Deimling, 2018:32). Her argument goes like this:

(1) A desire (as opposed to a mere wish) will take into account the possibility of following through with an action considering the necessary means. (G 394)

(2) *Our empirical natures*, in one way or another, require a feeling in order to put our desires into action (ascribing this to Kant is controversial; but we find it clearly expressed at least in the *Metaphysics of Morals* at 399).

(3) Therefore, there is a necessary connection between feeling and desire. (Deimling, 2018:32; emphasis added)

We can readily see that the empirical element—"our empirical nature"—has sneaked into this argumentation. Since Deimling has taken the assumption from our empirical observations, the relation between pleasure and desire can hardly be *a priori*. Furthermore, Kant makes it clear that the suspected relation is between feeling and "the pure faculty of cognition *a priori*" (AK, 20:230). Kant's faculties of cognitions are understanding, judgement, and reason; the faculty of desire belongs in no way to the faculties of cognition. So the transcendental

relation is not between feeling and desire, no matter *a priori* or empirical

However, this does not mean that the faculty of feeling has no relation with the faculty of desire. In fact, I will show that the transcendental definition of pleasure is always accompanied, or even preceded by the transcendental definitions of life and desire. But it is one thing that Kant uses similar transcendental elements in the explanation of these concepts; it is another thing that there are *a priori* principles amongst these concepts. My conclusive point is that their relations are not transcendental, but anthropological.

## 5.2 Anthropological relation of life, desire and pleasure

Kant often presents the transcendental definition of life, desire, and pleasure as a triad. In the Preface of the second *Critique*, Kant states that the explication of these concepts "must be given in order, as is reasonable" (CPrR, 5:09). He further explains that:

Life is the faculty of a being to act in accordance with laws of the faculty of desire. The faculty of desire is a being's faculty to be by means of its representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations. Pleasure is the representation of the agreement of an object or of an action with the subjective conditions of life, i. e., with the faculty of the causality of a representation with respect to the reality of its object (or with respect to the determination of the powers of the subject to action in order to produce the object). (CPrR, 5:09)

The same pattern reoccurs in the published third *Critique*. In §1, the first logical moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant claims that the representation of the object of beauty "is related entirely to the subject, indeed to its feeling of life, under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure." (CJ, 5:204). In §10, Kant starts with a transcendental account of purpose and then gradually moves towards a transcendental account of pleasure and displeasure. (CJ, 5: 219-220) The pattern of triad could be mistakenly recognized as there being some transcendental connections among these three concepts. This path is quite alluring; after all, Kant admits that "[t]he attainment of every aim is combined with the feeling of pleasure" (CJ, 5:186) and the possibility of holding an aim is due to our faculty of desire. At the first sight, there is a close connection between the faculty of desire and the faculty of feeling.

However, I insist that the relations between life, desire, and pleasure are not transcendental, namely they don't obtain *a priori* principles to each other. There

are three reasons: 1) first we can say that the claim that "the attainment of every aim is accompanied by the feeling of pleasure" is based on our empirical observation and self-reflection. In Kant's framework, we can reasonably imagine other rational beings (like angels) who do not have feelings but still act to their own will. 2) In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, what Kant has established is that the faculty of desire can directly give actions without the precondition of any feeling. Even if Kant *Metaphysics of Morals* offers a much richer conception of feelings, it should not be read as a falsification of his early claim. 3) In Kant's geography of the mind, the three faculties of the human mind are cognition, desire, and feeling, whereas the three faculties of cognition is understanding, judgement, and reason, presented in Kant's own table (CJ, 5:198)

**Table 1. All Mental Capacities Provided by Kant**

All the faculties of the mind	Faculty of cognition	<i>A priori</i> principles	Application to
Faculty of cognition	Understanding	Lawfulness	Nature
Feeling of pleasure and displeasure	Power of judgment	Purposiveness	Art
Faculty of desire	Reason	Final end	Freedom

For Kant, the *a priori* relations are always between the faculty of the mind and the faculty of cognition. We use categories to explain the phenomena caused by these mental faculties. Although the debate on the boundary between Kant's transcendental philosophy and anthropology is very complicated, here I want to propose a rather straightforward strategy: the investigation of the relations amongst the first column belongs to anthropology, whereas the studies on the relation between the first and the second column belong to the transcendental philosophy. The relation between pleasure and desire thus belongs to the realm of anthropology.

### 5.3 Answering the questions

Hence, to the first question of how is Kant able to provide a transcendental definition at the beginning of the third *Critique*, the answer is that Kant's transcendental definition on the feeling of pleasure appears earlier than the third *Critique*. At least in the second *Critique*, Kant has already developed this transcendental definition that he later keeps in the First Introduction of the third *Critique*. His change of attitude towards the possibility of finding an *a priori* principle for the faculty of feeling does not entail that he changes his transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure.

This leads us to the second question of why Kant insists on explaining

pleasure and displeasure in terms of the category of causality. The answer is that Kant always explains pleasure in relation to the concept of life and desire. Whenever Kant wants to talk about transcendental definitions, he starts with the causality of life. In his own copy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says in a note that:

Transcendental definitions (Transscendentale Definitionen): The causality of representations of a being in respect of the objects of them is life. The determinability of the power of representation to this causality is the faculty of desire. (Note to CPR, A538/B566; E CLXIII, pp. 5 1-2; 23:41)

We can see from this note that the transcendental definition of life is the most fundamental one. The causality of life, for Kant, is the ability to act in accordance with one's representation in mind and make a difference to the external objects. In other words, life is the ability to act within. All other transcendental definitions are built upon this definition and therefore carry the transcendental mark of "causality" with them. This is of course a very brief explanation but it suffices to show that the "causality" that appears in the transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure is closely linked with Kant's general understanding of life and desire.

## 6 Conclusion

In this essay, I have explored the meaning and the function of the transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure. Although this account does not occupy a length space in the third *Critique*, it is still worth investigating. The reasons are that, firstly, some scholars hold different opinions towards this phrase and towards the possible functions it could play. So it is useful to explain their mistakes and more importantly to explain their hidden intentions. Secondly, along the course of this paper, many wider philosophical questions have emerged: the phenomenology of pleasure and displeasure, the transcendental relation between feeling and judging, and the distinction between Kant's philosophy and anthropology, etc. Thirdly, the investigation of a transcendental definition of pleasure and displeasure also helps to connect Kant's theory with contemporary topics as the intentionality and the disposition of feelings. So I regard this essay as laying a foundation for further studies in these areas.

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