

# Das Selbst und die Welt

Beiträge zu Kant und der  
nachkantischen Philosophie

*Festschrift für Günter Zöller*

Herausgegeben von

Manja Kisner

Giovanni Pietro Basile

Ansgar Lyssy

Michael Bastian Weiß

Königshausen & Neumann

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Zhengmi Zhouhuang

There is a three-dimensional tension in Kant's thesis of "Beauty as a symbol of Morality":

1. Kant defines the concept of symbol in a special way to render the concept intuitive. Why is this sensible presentation necessary and how is the procedure possible? The duality of sensibility and intelligibility as well as the duality of concept and intuition are basic clues to Kant's system. Kant draws a substantial difference between intelligibility and sensibility for the first time in philosophical history by distinguishing between spontaneity and passivity. But sensibility needs intelligibility to be determined and intelligibility needs sensibility to be realized. Clarifying the tension between intelligibility and sensibility is the first difficult point in understanding the mediating function of symbol. The second point lies in the indirectness of the presentation of the symbolization. In contrast to schematism, which presents a concept with a corresponding intuition, symbolism is not a demonstration of the content of the concept but an analogue to the empirical intuition to another different object. The heterogeneity makes the correlation between sensibility and intelligibility more complex.

2. Concerning the connotation of the thesis, the question will be in what way does beauty symbolize morality. After Baumgarten founded Aesthetics, Kant further built Aesthetics from the transcendental perspective as a discipline independent of cognition and moral philosophy, but integrated within the context of the transcendental and critical legitimization of the faculties of reason (understanding, practical reason and reflective judgment) for seeking truth, practicing morality and tasting beauty, as well as *a priori* principles (lawfulness, final end and subjective purposiveness) (KU 5: 198, EE 20: 246). As two completely different philosophical fields, how is it possible to build a symbolic connection between beauty and morality without devastating their independence and autonomy?

3. What is the philosophical function of the symbolic relationship between beauty and morality in the construction of Kant's philosophical system? First, although Kant defines the symbolic relationship between beauty and morality as a kind of formal analogue that has nothing to do with their content, he also claims that they accelerate each other: On the one hand, taste makes us ready for the moral disposition (see KU 5: 354), while on the other hand, the true propaedeutic of taste lies in the cultiva

tion of the moral feeling (see KU 5: 358). In what sense and to what limit do they need to be mutually accelerated? Does Kant, similar to Schiller, regard aesthetics as a necessary solution to moral problems in modern society and even define the aesthetic dimension as an essential feature of a human being?

Furthermore, when Kant begins to build his third *Critique*, in addition to proving the universal validity of aesthetics, he is faced with a systemic problem task — to combine theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy into one whole or to complete the transition from nature to freedom. This requirement for unification represents not only Kant's own interest in the construction of his philosophical system but also the oldest systematic program of German Idealism.<sup>1</sup> "Beauty as a symbol of morality" lies in the tension between the two tasks of the third *Critique*: on the one hand, the symbolism of beauty must be grounded in its own autonomy; on the other hand, it is one of the important ways to transition from nature to freedom. Can Kant maintain the balance between the autonomy of the Aesthetic and its mediating function with the symbolic thesis, or has he gone so far as to regard beauty as a sensuous manifestation of a rational idea, similar to Schelling and Hegel?

Accordingly, this paper comprises four sections. Section 1 compares the various forms of duality of intelligibility and sensibility as well as their connections in Kant's philosophy and clarifies the mechanism of the concept of symbolism — rendering the abstract concept intuitive and sensible through an analogy with the rule of reflection and thus differentiating it from the other way of sensuous representation — aesthetic attribute. Section 2 analyzes the previous research on this thesis and proposes that beauty's symbolism of the moral lies in the similar rule of aesthetic reflection and moral disposition, i.e., negative freedom (the purity of excluding sensuous interests) and positive freedom (the spontaneity of self-legislation), and thereby distinguishes it from aesthetic ideas that represent subjective principles of reason directly in the free play of imagination. The last two sections explore the philosophical significations of the symbol thesis, a quasi-substantial connection between beauty and morality. The thesis is embodied not only in their mutual acceleration regarding the aesthetic and moral cultivation in the empirical-anthropological dimension (section 3) but also in the transitional function of Aesthetics in the systematic construction of Kant's transcendental philosophy (section 4).

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<sup>1</sup> See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*. In: *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Werke*. Frankfurt a. M. 1971, 234-235.

### *1. Symbolism as an analogy between rules of reflection*

The opposition between intelligibility and sensibility is the basic presupposition of Kant's critical philosophy. The former is active, formal, possible and legislative, while the latter is passive, material, actual and determined. An important task in the dually constructed philosophy is to combine both sides, because the concepts and rules of the former must be realized in the latter. In Kant's epistemology, human beings as finite rational beings cannot grasp things intuitively, as would complete rational beings equipped with an intuitive intellect. Human knowledge can only be obtained through the cooperation of discursive understanding and sensibility. The latter can bring about intuitive manifolds through being passively affected by given objects in space and time, and the former provide the manifolds with universal concepts so that they can be determined. The possibility of the heterogeneous application of categories to appearances lies in a mediating device that is simultaneously intellectual and sensible — "Schemata". A schema serves to render concepts concrete and to lend them reality. More precisely, Kant defines a schema as a "representation of a general procedure of the imagination for providing a concept with its image" (KrV A 141/B 180). Unlike the images that serve to render a concept intuitive by exemplification and instantiation, schemata furnish not concrete instances for the application of a given concept but the procedural rules for providing images for such a concept. The schema of an empirical concept, such as 'dog', is a rule for the empirical imagination to specify the image in general; the schema of a sensible concept, such as 'triangle', signifies a rule of pure a priori imagination to construct pure images. In contrast, the schema of a pure concept of understanding, such as 'entities', is a rule of the imagination to synthesize appearances into possible objects of experience, and the usage of imagination is under the transcendental time determination.

Similar to cognitive judgment, moral judgment is also an application of an a priori universal law to us in concrete sensible situations that also requires a mediation, like the schemata, that is intellectual and sensible. However, different and more complicated, the moral law is something supersensible and has no corresponding sensible intuition. Thus, according to Kant, the type of pure practical reason provides a model for the application of moral law to a possible action (but not to an action as an actual event) in the sensible world. The type is then not a schema of sensibility but the law of nature that, as the understanding's pure form of the sensible world, can not only connect to the intelligible world but also apply to the sensible object. Even more complicated in the moral praxis is that it concerns not only a question of judgment and cognition but also a

question of action and conation, which also involves a combination of intelligibility and sensibility, that is, how the moral law “has influence on the sensibility of the subject and effects a feeling conducive to the influence of the law upon the will” (KpV 5: 75). According to Kant, the incentive of pure practical reason as the subjective determining ground can be nothing but the respect for the moral law because only this feeling has a rational and a priori but not pathological and empirical origin and precludes the influence of subjective inclinations.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant provides two ways to render the practical law sensible through the judgment and the incentive of pure practical reason, but both ways concern the question of how the law practically determines the will objectively and subjectively but not how to contemplatively make the law intuitive. The former is about the faculty of desire and the latter about the faculty of cognition. Unlike the concepts of understanding, the concepts of reason are supersensible, and we have no corresponding intuition. Therefore, we cannot present them in a direct way but only in an indirect way. According to Kant, symbolism is a special way to render rational concepts intuitive — through analogy. Just as judgment plays a role in the schematization of concepts of understanding, so does judgment in symbolization, but in the former situation it is the determinative judgment, and in the latter situation it is the reflective judgment. There are then two questions to be clarified regarding this indirect presentation through analogy as follows: 1. Which features are to be compared, and 2. How to define the relationship of analogy?

The first question is what is to be compared. Kant emphasizes that judgment in symbolism is related to the rule of reflection rather than the content of reflection. In symbolism, “the power of judgment proceeds in a way merely analogous to that which it observes in schematization, i.e., it is merely the rule of this procedure, not of the intuition itself, and thus merely the form of the reflection, not the content, which corresponds to the concept” (KU 5: 351). The reflection here is different from the reflection in the aesthetic reflective judgment, but reflection in general can be understood as the “consciousness of activity in combining the manifold of ideas according to a rule of the unity of manifold” (Anth 7: 141, see KrV A 260/B 216 ff., Logik 9: 94). Thus, what the judgment concerns here is not the common feature of the manifold (material) but the rule of unification (form). Unlike the schematism of pure understanding that signifies a rule of synthesis directly, the power of judgment in symbolism performs a double task, first applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition and then the rule of reflection for that intuition to quite another object. In this way, the symbolized concept is analogous to the intuitive object but not consistent.



Kant uses a famous example to illustrate analogous relationships in the symbolic relationship. A body with a soul symbolizes a monarchy, and a machine (like a handmill) symbolizes a despotic state. Although there is no similarity between their content in symbolization, there is one “between the rule for reflecting on both and their causality” (KU 5: 352). In the former relationship, there is a similarity between the internal purposiveness of the organism and the internal legislation by the citizens of the country and the reciprocal relationship between citizens and the country; while in the latter, there is a similarity between the mechanism, in which one part moves the other parts, thus contributing to the motion of the whole, and the governance of the social whole by a politically privileged single part.

The second question is what is the analogy? In the Jäsche Logic, Kant attributes induction and analogy as the two modes of inference of the power of reflective judgment. Both modes proceed from the particular (many) to the universal (one) with common grounds. Unlike the inferences of reason, the inferences of judgment are only empirical — they are only dispensable for the sake of extending our cognition — and limitedly valid. While induction infers from many to all things of a kind according to the principle of universalization, an analogy infers from many determinations of a kind to the remaining ones according to the principle of specification. Analogy extends the particular similarity to the total similarity of two things or the given properties of one thing to the other properties of the same thing.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines analogy as a kind of relationship in the temporal dimension. As an a priori principle for the application of pure concepts of understanding to experience, an analogy of experience is “a rule in accordance with which the unity of experience is to arise from perceptions” (KrV A 180/B 222). Through comparison to mathematical analogy, which is the identity of quantitative relations (such as 1:2=2:4), Kant interprets a philosophical analogy as the identity of two qualitative relations. According to the rule provided by the analogy of experience, we cognize the relationship with a fourth item (x) from three given items (a, b, c). In *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, the meaning of analogy is further clarified. It “does not signify, as the word is usually taken, an imperfect similarity between two things, but rather a perfect similarity between two relations in wholly dissimilar things” (Prol 4: 357). In addition, it is expressed as the formula  $A : B = c : x$ . “E.g., the promotion of the happiness of the children = a is to the love of the parents = b as the welfare of humankind = c is to the unknown in God = x, which we call love” (Prol 4: 357). It can be seen that, on the one hand, what is to be compared here are the internal relations of two things but

not the two things themselves (the two things themselves are completely different); on the other hand, the basis of comparison lies in the perfect similarity of the internal relations, which are not different in quality.

In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish symbols from aesthetic attributes. Like symbols, aesthetic attributes are also a way of presenting concepts with intuitive representations. According to Kant, we often present ideas of reason aesthetically in artistic creations with some forms that “do not constitute the presentation of a given concept itself, but, as supplementary representations of the imagination, express only the implications connected with it and its affinity with others, are called (aesthetic) attributes” (KU 5: 315). For example, we regard Jupiter’s eagle as an attribute of the powerful king of heaven and the peacock as that of the queen of heaven. Unlike the logic attribute representing the content of the concept itself, the aesthetic attribute gives the imagination a cause to spread itself over a multitude of related representations. These representations generated from the creative activity of imagination surpass the determinate connotation of the concept and let a man think more. Kant defines such representations of imagination as aesthetic ideas, which serve the idea of reason through the creative activity of imagination and animation of the mind “by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations” (KU 5: 315).

Although both are intuitive presentations of the ideas of reason, aesthetic attribute and symbol have different ways of presenting. First and most importantly, the symbol concerns the similarity between the concept and the sensible representation regarding the rules of their causality, while the aesthetic attribute concerns the implications connected with the concept and its affinity with others. The former concerns the formal rule of reflection while the latter concerns the content, although not necessarily the connotation of the concept itself but a more related content as far as the imaginable aroused by it.

Second, although both of them represent the application of reflective judgment, the aesthetic reflective power of judgment plays an important role in aesthetic attributes. The affinity between concepts and representations is grounded in the free activity of the creative imagination, although such activities are carried out in the play between imagination and understanding and under the guidance and regulation of reason. However, regarding the symbol, the analogy first refers to the similarity between the internal structure of two things, that is, we have to grasp the rules for reflecting on their causality (such as the mechanism of a handmill, or moral disposition). The judgment involved here can be determining the power of judgment (e.g., in morality) or the reflective power of judgment (e.g., in beauty), or the two kinds of power of judgment simultaneously

(e.g., in empirical concepts such as the monarchical state or the hand-mill); second, unlike the aesthetic power of judgment in the aesthetic attribute, the logic power of judgment is also needed in the symbol because the analogy here is between the rule of reflection.

## 2. How does beauty symbolize morality?

There have been many discussions on the proposition “beauty as a symbol of morality”. Paul Guyer explains the third *Critique* as a transition from nature to freedom from the perspective of moral epistemology and psychology in “Feeling and Freedom”. He defines the transitional task as showing the possibility and necessity of coordinating the relationship between feeling and moral obligation. He believes that the symbol of morality, as one of many solutions to the transition, is based on the parallel structure of taste and moral judgment (harmony of sensible and intellectual faculties) and that both are based on the supersensible substratum.<sup>2</sup> In a later paper, “The Symbol of Freedom in Kant’s Aesthetics”, he believes that there are a number of different ways in which the aesthetic can serve as a symbol of the moral, i.e., present the moral as accessible to our senses: The sublime embodies the negative concept of freedom, while the freedom of imagination demonstrates its positive concept; the harmonious relationship between understanding and imagination in the judgment of taste symbolizes the harmony between reason and choice in moral action, and the natural existence of beauty symbolizes the possibility of the highest good.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, I agree with Guyer’s interpretation of the symbolic basis as a parallel structure between the judgment of taste and moral judgment, but I disagree with his following expansive interpretations. 1. Kant never claimed that the sublime can symbolize morality. Although the sublime is closer to morality than beauty in terms of content, there is, in terms of the rule of reflection, in the judgment of sublime a transition from no interest as a premise to the stimulated moral interest as an outcome and from free play of imagination to a serious affairs state for the reason of

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Guyer, “Feeling and freedom. Kant on aesthetics and morality”. In: *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48 (2). 1990, 137–146. Also see Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. Cambridge 1997, 331–345.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Guyer, “The symbols of freedom in Kant’s aesthetics”. In: Herman Parret (ed.), *Kants Ästhetik. Kant’s Aesthetics. L’Esthétique de Kant*, Berlin/New York 1998, 338–355.

imagination.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the reflective structure of sublime judgment is clearly different from the judgment of taste, and it is difficult to say that the imagination is completely free. In addition, the independence of and resistance against natural inclinations is indeed emphasized in the sublime as a symbol of negative freedom, but the same thing (disinterestedness) is also the basal premise of judgment of taste.

2. Guyer especially chooses natural beauty to illustrate its symbol of morality but a combined intellectual interest in natural beauty is precisely contrary to the purity that is required by the symbolic relationship. Although the ultimate purpose (moral vocation) of the existence of appreciators revealed by natural beauty provides an important argument that beauty is the transition from nature to freedom. However, the way of this transition is not the same as the way provided by the symbol of beauty to morality. The latter is based on the static similarity of reflective structure between beauty and moral judgment, while the former needs to abandon the purity of the judgment of taste and then complete the transition to morality through the evocation of our own morality in natural beauty under the guidance of intellectual interest.

3. Guyer claims that the supersensible substratum in aesthetic experience symbolizes the supersensible substratum in morality. I think this interpretation metaphysically elevates Kant's empirical standpoint on the judgment of taste from the perspective of the *Analytic* to the *Dialectic* of the aesthetic power of judgment. According to the *Analytic*, Kant needs not to ground aesthetics on the basis of a supersensible substratum — with the principle of the subjective principle of purposiveness, the universal validity of taste can already be explained and augmented (in the third moment and deduction). The supersensible substratum is introduced as a prior principle until in the *Dialectic*, because introduction of it in the analytic would sabotage the autonomy of taste. I will argue that the symbolic relationship is not based on the elevated principle of taste but only on its definition in the *Analytic* and that only through symbolism can we transcend the pure taste and look toward the intelligible. This point will be further explained in the fourth section.

4. Guyer believes that the basic grounds for beauty's symbolism of the moral is the parallel structure of aesthetic judgment and moral judgment in terms of their autonomy and harmony between faculties. I generally agree with this interpretation but still think that symbolism has not

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<sup>4</sup> Zhengmi Zhouhuang, "Turn from Sensibility to Reason: Kant's Concept of the Sublime". In: Stephen R. Palmquist (ed.): *Kant on Intuition. Western and Asian Perspectives on Transcendental Idealism*. Routledge 2019, 179–191.

been fully explained in this way. According to this interpretative mode, the intellectual pleasure in terms of obtaining new knowledge and an organism in teleological judgment can also symbolize morality because there are also autonomy and harmony in both kinds of judgment. However, it seems that neither of them reveals Kant's original point because there is not enough freedom in both the empirical cognitive judgment and the teleological judgment, nor self-legislative spontaneity.

In *Kant's Theory of Taste*, Henry Allison claims that aesthetic ideas must be introduced into the interpretation of Kant's account of beauty's symbolization of morality. This is because aesthetic reflection is not determined by the concept, while the law of reason determines the moral judgment. To explain this symbolic relationship between these two contrasting phenomena, it is necessary to introduce aesthetic ideas because only through the latter do aesthetics show transcendental efforts to strive for the supersensible, thus indirectly presenting the rational ideas. Since both artistic beauty and natural beauty are expressions of aesthetic ideas, both can be used as symbols of morality: artistic beauty expresses rational ideas sensibly through aesthetic ideas that are occasioned by a concept of the object, while natural beauty expresses rational ideas because of its idea of moral purposiveness — and the latter has relatively more advantage than the former.<sup>5</sup> Coincidentally, Deng Xiaomang translated aesthetic attributes (*Attribute*)<sup>6</sup> into the aesthetic symbol (*Symbol*) in the Chinese edition of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which also caused confusion between aesthetic ideas and beauty's symbolism.

One of the serious consequences of this kind of confusion is that, as Allison has already realized, it collapses the symbol thesis in a certain way. Although all artistic beauty expresses aesthetic ideas and thus symbolizes rational ideas, not all rational ideas are morally good ideas because ideas such as death, vices, envy and hell also belong to rational ideas. To defend his interpretation, Allison has to change Kant's original thesis: not all artistic beauties symbolize morality — only art that combines with moral ideas can symbolize morality. This undoubtedly deviates from Kant's original intention.

Both, in Guyer's introduction of the sublime and his special emphasis on natural beauty, as well as in Allison's introduction of aesthetic ideas to explain beauty as a symbol of morality, there is a common misunderstanding: they have neglected that in the symbol thesis Kant emphasizes the similarity between the rules of reflection rather than the contentual

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, Cambridge 2001, 254 ff.

<sup>6</sup> See *Critique of the power of Judgment*. Trans. Deng Xiaomang. Renmin press. Beijing 2002, 159.

connection. Just as there is no similarity between a monarchical state and a handmill, beauty does not need to relate to morality substantively. Beauty becomes the symbol of morality not because of their contentual connection. In contrast, only when we exclude moral interest in the judgment of taste can the purity of aesthetic reflection be maintained and beauty can be similar to morality in terms of their pure form of reflection. Conversely, morality is not necessarily beautiful, and the moral prescription often hampers the free play of imagination and hinders the generation of pure pleasure. The independence and autonomy of the aesthetic judgment are guaranteed by the *a priori* principle of purposiveness and do not rely on the symbol of morality. Therefore, how does beauty symbolize morality?

In §59, Kant enumerates the following four grounds for beauty's symbolism of morality. 1. Beauty and morality pleases immediately; the former is in reflecting intuition, while the latter is in the law of practical reason. 2. Both please without any sensible and empirical interests. The former excludes any interests, including intellectual interests, while the latter excludes sensible concerns and combines moral interests. 3. Both show some freedom: "the freedom of the imagination (thus of the sensibility of our faculty) is represented in the judging of the beautiful as in accord with the lawfulness of the understanding (in the moral judgment the freedom of the will is conceived as the agreement of the latter with itself in accordance with universal laws of reason)" (KU 5: 354). 4. Both are universally valid; the former is subjective universal validity that does not involve any concepts, while the latter is objective universal validity determined by moral law.

The four groups of similarities and differences between beauty and moral judgment correspond roughly to the four moments in the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. The first and second points are characterizations of disinterestedness and universal pleasure in aesthetic and moral judgments. The fourth illustrates the necessity of their universality. The third illustrates how the mental faculties work in both situations. The first two points can be seen as negative and premising; the fourth point is consequential, because necessity is guaranteed by principle; and the third point explains the principle of reflection — similar to the subjective principle of purposiveness in the judgment of taste. Among these, the third point is the most important but puzzling. According to Kant's definition of symbol, beauty's symbolism of morality should be based on the similarity "between the rule for reflecting on both and their causality" (KU 5: 352), but what is reflected in the judgment of taste is the free play between imagination and understanding regarding the given representations. Through the sensible consciousness of this mental status, we realize that the mental status

fulfills the subjective principle of purposiveness, while in moral disposition, we ascertain intellectually the determination of moral obligation. The free play is completely different from the determination by moral law.

Indeed, there are similarities between the freedom of aesthetics and the freedom of morality: the rules reflected in the two judgments are a priori and pure, both of which are free in the negative sense, that is, free from sensible inclinations. However, the freedom of imagination in the judgment of taste that connects and creates representations spontaneously without the determination of concepts and rules is still far from the freedom of the will in morality. The latter contains two meanings, not only negative freedom but also positive freedom, that is, the self-legislation of practical reason. However, the power of imagination is not autonomous; it is only in a lawful relationship with understanding.

To avoid conflict and to understand Kant's analogy between the beauty and morality better, we can create a concept that Kant did not use — aesthetic freedom. Corresponding to moral freedom, we attribute aesthetic freedom not to imagination but to the higher cognitive faculty that is legislative in aesthetic judgment — the aesthetic reflective power of judgment. Although in the third *Critique* Kant often uses the expression of freedom of imagination (e.g., KU 5: 217, 242, 287) and also talks about the autonomy of the power of judgment (KU 5: 185, EE 20: 225), he hardly speaks about the freedom of judgment. However, if we check Kant's basic characterization of freedom, especially moral freedom, the aesthetic power of judgment fits both the negative and the positive definition of freedom.

It is also worth mentioning that the freedom in the aesthetic reflection is not only similar to the moral freedom but is also more thorough than moral freedom. In terms of negative freedom, aesthetic reflection not only excludes sensible interest but also excludes intellectual interest. The judgment of taste is not determined by any concept (concepts of understanding or reason) but is merely reflective. In terms of positive freedom, the aesthetic autonomy is not only autonomy, similar to the legislation of understanding to nature, but also the legislation of power of judgment to itself, i.e., it is both the law and the object of a law. In this sense, Kant called autonomy in aesthetic judgment heautonomy (EE 20: 225, KU 5: 186, 200 f., 288).

However, the spontaneity of the aesthetic freedom embodies not only the self-legislation of the power of judgment but also the law that is creatively formed in its application. Unlike the categories and the moral law that are a priori determining forms of understanding and reason, the principle of subjective purposiveness is only regulative. It can be con-

scious through the feeling of pleasure which is the result of the free play between understanding and imagination. The aesthetic pleasure has an internal causality, namely, that of “maintaining the state of the representation of the mind and the occupation of the cognitive powers without a further aim. We linger over the consideration of the beautiful because this consideration strengthens and reproduces itself” (KU 5: 222). Kant defines aesthetic pleasure as “the consciousness of the merely formal purposiveness in the play of the cognitive powers of the subject” (KU 5: 223). In this sense, we do not presuppose any subjective or objective end in taste, but the reflected mental state is suitable for the sensible end of the subject — regarding its function of strengthening the feeling of life. This kind of subjective and formal purposiveness that is achieved and made conscious in the free play of cognitive faculties in turn becomes the principle of taste. That is, the reflective power of judgment spontaneously finds its own law in its application, which never happens in both cognition and morality. In this sense, the positive freedom of aesthetics (autonomy) is more spontaneous than the freedom of morality.<sup>7</sup>

In the first section, we distinguished beauty as a symbol of morality from aesthetic ideas as an exhibition of rational ideas by their way of operation. Here, we can further distinguish them by their connotations. The symbol relation emphasizes the purity and disinterestedness of the judgment of taste. However, aesthetic ideas do not exist in the thrall of the pure aesthetic judgment. The aesthetic idea is either occasioned by a concept of the object (in beauty of art) or arouses a moral idea through combination with intellectual interest (in natural beauty) (see KU 5:320). Compared to the free play of imagination and understanding in pure aesthetic judgment, imagination in aesthetic ideas is guided by reason and expands in the direction of supersensible things. However, because rational ideas cannot be directly intuited, we can only express them indirectly. In aesthetic ideas, imagination “emulates the precedent of reason in attaining to a maximum” and makes rational ideas sensible “with a completeness” (KU 5: 314). The so-called “completeness” does not refer to the completeness of the content of rational ideas — the latter can never be known — but refers to the way that imagination “spreading itself over a multitude of related representations” (KU 5: 315) with the inducement of reason, that is to say, the infinite expansion of imagination, approaches the supersensibility of rational ideas.

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<sup>7</sup> See also Birgit Recki, “Die Dialektik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft und die Methodenlehre des Geschmacks”, (§§55–60). In: Otfried Höffe (ed.), *Immanuel Kant: Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Berlin 2008, 202–205.



### *3. The mutual acceleration of beauty and morality from the empirical anthropological perspective*

When Kant introduces the concept of the symbol and explains the symbol thesis, Kant emphasizes the formal similarity between beauty and morality, but concerning the effects of symbolism, Kant seems to transform this formal relationship into a quasi-substantive one that, on the one hand, embodies the notion that beauty prepares for moral cultivation — “[t]aste as it were makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest without too violent a leap by representing the imagination even in its freedom as purposively determinable for the understanding and teaching us to find a free satisfaction in the objects of the senses even without any sensible charm” (KU 5: 354) — and that on the other hand, embodies the notion that the true propaedeutic for taste requires the development of moral ideas and the cultivation of moral feeling, “for only when sensibility is brought into accord with this can genuine taste assume a determinate, unalterable form” (KU 5: 358).

Transforming the formal analogy into a quasi-substantive relationship raises the following questions: First, what is the legitimacy of this quasi-substantive relationship? In addition to beauty’s symbolism of morality, Kant also mentions many other symbols, such as the symbol of a handmill in relation to a despotic state and the symbol of “flow” out of something in relation to the concept of “follow”. However, in these analogues, we cannot establish any substantive relationship between the concepts and their sensible representations. The mechanism of the handmill cannot promote the formation of despotism, and the state of outflow does not concern causality. The advantage of symbols is only rhetoric, i.e., to make the concept easier to understand. Then, what is the particularity in the analogy between beauty and morality that makes it transcend the formal relationship and turn it into a quasi-substantive relationship? Second, why do beauty and morality need each other for their own cultivations? In what sense does the reciprocal acceleration of aesthetic and moral cultivation function? Finally, is the respective autonomy of beauty and morality contradictory to this reciprocal acceleration, in other words, how far can they reciprocally accelerate each other without destroying their own autonomy? Regarding the first question: as a sensible presentation of concepts, its function is only rhetorical. In the general symbolic relationship, two rules of reflection to be compared are related to two different objects, such as the mechanism of the handmill and the political structure of a despotic state. The symbolic relationship not only crosses the boundary between the abstract and the concrete (also the intellectual and the sensible) but also spans different objects. Thus, although the

example of the handmill helps to understand despotism, there is no substantive relationship between the two, and neither the production nor the operation of a handmill can accelerate despotism. However, in the beauty's symbol of morality, both the rules of reflection of aesthetic and moral judgments involve internal mental faculties and status. According to Kant, beauty does not lie in the perfect features of objects, and morality does not lie in the utilitarian calculation of consequences of actions. Both are based on human mental faculties, corresponding to higher cognitive faculties and their transcendental principles. In this sense, although the beauty's symbolism of morality faces the gap between supersensibility and sensibility on the one hand, it also involves two kinds of human activities — moral practice and aesthetic judgment — but both of these activities are grounded in human mental faculties and dispositions. In this sense, although there is a leap between beauty and morality, this leap should be understood as one between two adjacent mental states within the same subject that is transitable, that is, from a relaxed and harmonious play between sensibility and reason to a serious affairs state in which sensibility is determined by reason. Thus, the formal and parallel relation in the symbolism can be transferred into a quasi-substantive relationship.

Regarding the second question, in what sense does the reciprocal acceleration of aesthetic and moral cultivation function, the autonomy of beauty and morality is understood from the perspective of transcendental philosophy, and the transcendental philosophy only solves the problem of how an (aesthetic or moral) a priori synthetic judgment is possible — it does not describe the aesthetic experience and moral practice in moral experience. From the empirical anthropological perspective, there is no judgment of taste or a completely rational will but only the common aesthetic power of judgment and the common practical reason.<sup>8</sup>

The difference between common faculties in daily experience and a priori faculties in transcendental philosophy can be differentiated in a negative and a positive respect. 1. In a negative respect, the common aesthetic experience and common human reason will be affected by sensible inclinations and cannot maintain purity, like the application of a priori faculties. 2. In a positive respect, the common faculties in daily life are

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<sup>8</sup> Although Kant often talks about common human understanding (*der gemeine Menschenverstand*) and common human reason (*die gemeine Menschenvernunft*) in the theoretical and practical field, he does not mention the concept of common aesthetic judgment, but he does express the view that it is difficult for us to expect pure judgment of taste without any interest in experience or to expect a universal aesthetic judgment beyond the time and the nation (KU 5: 231 f.).

deficient compared to a priori faculties and need to be improved and examined through experience. For example, if you do not understand ancient Chinese, you cannot appreciate the rhythmic of ancient Chinese po-tries; if you are not familiar with the Western religious background, you cannot fully appreciate Bach's music (see KU 5: 282). Although Kant believes that common reason could easily distinguish good from evil (see GMS 4: 404) at the outset, unlike the deficiency of common human knowledge and appreciation in experience, it is difficult to determine the human will subjectively, i.e., to make the moral law sensible and accessible to the agent and to push him to moral action. In this way, the task of aesthetic and moral cultivation is on the one hand negative, that is, to purify the common aesthetic power of judgment and human understanding to eliminate the influence of sensible inclinations. On the other hand, the task is to develop and strengthen the faculties: in terms of taste, the task is to expand understanding and facilitate imagination to achieve harmony between them in a wider and deeper dimension; in terms of morality, the moral cultivation and the purification of will is consistent because "morality must have more power over the human heart the more purely it is presented" (KpV 5: 156). The reciprocal acceleration between beauty and morality can also be shown in these two respects.

As mentioned above, the beauty's symbol of morality embodies the similarity of their rules of reflection in terms of both the negative and positive aspects of freedom. In terms of negative freedom, the purity of disinterestedness in taste prepares the purity of will in a moral disposition; as far as positive freedom is concerned, the autonomy of the aesthetic provides us with an experience in which imagination and understanding agree with each other in their free play, which is an undetermined and spontaneously founded subjective purposiveness. This harmonious relationship between sensibility and intelligibility, which can be achieved easily in a relaxed play, will help to improve the antagonism between duty and inclination in moral practice, and the facilitation of the cognitive faculties (imagination and understanding) will also enhance our receptivity to rational ideas (see KU 5: 354, KpV 5: 160).

The difficulty in moral cultivation lies in the complete determination of sensibility by practical reason, while in aesthetic cultivation, the balance between sensibility and intelligence is more important. To achieve a harmonious state, we need to promote our taste by learning from models so that the concepts of understanding (such as basic knowledge of music and painting) can be expanded and the power of judgment can be trained; on the other hand, we need to protect our simple nature so that the freedom of imagination and the creativity of the genius will not be stifled. According to Kant, the moral feeling as an a priori feeling — the respect

for moral law — is the effect of moral law on our mind.<sup>9</sup> The rational determination of sensibility guarantees the universal validity of moral emotion. By being conscious of the moral feeling, we can exclude private inclinations in aesthetic judgment so that the play between understanding and imagination can be truly free and taste can find and make its own law.

Although Kant writes that it is only when sensibility is brought into accord with the moral feeling that the “genuine taste [can] assume a determinate, unalterable form”<sup>1</sup> (KU 5: 358), this determinate pure form does not necessarily need to be achieved through the accordance with the moral feeling. By putting oneself into the position of everyone else (see KU 5: 294) or combining our judgment with empirical social interests (see KU 5: 297 f.) one can also help taste get rid of sensible inclinations and achieve a more pure state. Besides, this unalterable form cannot guarantee an improvement in taste because the certainty and purity of morality can neither protect the freedom of the imagination nor strengthen the vital feeling of life. Thus, morality is neither necessary nor sufficient for aesthetic cultivation. It is the same in terms of the role of beauty in moral cultivation: on the one hand, an aesthetic judgment does not directly touch and truly establish the idea of morality; on the other hand, although the aesthetics’ mental status can make moral cultivation easier by purifying the mind and enhancing the receptivity of morality, even without help from the aesthetic dimension the moral law has its own way of exerting its force on our hearts, for example, by presenting the moral disposition in examples (see KpV 5: 160, 156). Coldness and indifference of temperament does not prevent morality from giving people a supreme worth in character (see GMS 4: 398). Kant even believes that the power of morality shows itself most excellently precisely in suffering, when the consideration of one’s own sensible interests have to be completely excluded (see KpV 5: 156). In this sense, beauty is neither necessary nor sufficient for moral cultivation. This further indicates that the symbolic relationship between beauty and morality is merely a formal analogue but not a substantive one.

#### 4. *Beauty as transition from nature to freedom*

The important reason for the imperfection of taste and morality from an empirical anthropological perspective lies in the fact that human beings, as sensible-rational beings, are always influenced by sensible inclinations, which interfere with the pure a priori usage of higher cognitive faculties.

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<sup>9</sup> Zhouhuang Zhengmi, “On the Intellectual Feeling”. In: *Philosophical Research* 06. 2015, 78–84.

However, the dualism of sensibility and rationality of empirical subjects has its deep transcendental ground, that is, human beings, as both natural objects and free subjects, simultaneously follow the rule of nature prescribed by understanding and the rule of freedom prescribed by reason. A human being makes himself or herself with regard to nature a phenomenon in his or her own empirical consciousness, and he or she obeys the mechanical causality in the technical and pragmatic praxis; at the same time, he or she makes himself or herself a subject of freedom, a noumenon. This dualism is presented in the opposition of two fields in Kant's philosophical system: theoretical and practical philosophy, or nature and freedom. In the introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant puts forward that an important task for the third *Critique* is to unify theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy into a whole and complete the transition from nature to freedom. This task can be concretely expressed as the realization of supersensible moral ideas in the sensible world or the realization of freedom in nature.

In the whole book, Kant has tried to solve this transitional problem from many perspectives: in teleology, Kant interprets nature as an organic whole with an internal purpose and defines human being as its ultimate end, so that we can regard nature as a purposive system generating towards moral ends. However, in aesthetics, Kant deals with this task more from an internal perspective, i.e., from the states of mind, so the transition from nature to freedom is treated as a transition from the state of mind affected by sensible inclinations in the natural state to the pure moral disposition in which sensibility is determined by rational legislation. In addition to symbolism, there are also different ways to complete the task in aesthetics: in terms of art, on the one hand, the ideal of artistic beauty lies in the expression of morality through the human figure; on the other hand, the infinite expansion of imagination in the aesthetic idea presents the rational ideas in a sensible way. In terms of natural beauty, we combine the pure aesthetic judgment with an intellectual interest, so that the exploration of the grounds for the existence of natural products enables us to discover the moral vocation as the ultimate end of our existence. Whether in natural beauty or in artistic beauty, the transition from nature to freedom is not carried out in the form of pure aesthetics but presupposes or combines the concept or intellectual interest. Only through symbolism can beauty accomplish the transitional task formally and indirectly, so that no substantive connection with morality will destroy the autonomy of taste.

Many scholars have discussed the function of the symbol thesis for the transition. Guyer holds that the concept of the supersensible substrate on which the judgment of taste is based symbolizes morality, which

is also based on a supersensible substrate. Allison interprets symbolism as a transition from the sensible to the supersensible through the aesthetic idea. In my view, these interpretations make the formal relationship substantivized. The symbol thesis grounds only on the principle of judgment of taste (subjective purposiveness) that is discussed in the analytic of the beautiful, but not the concept of the supersensible substrate that is discussed in the dialectic of the dialectic. Only through the symbolic relationship does taste look toward the supersensible substrate. In the following, I will distinguish the principles of subjective purposiveness and the concept of supersensible substrate and then explain how the former makes taste look toward the latter and fulfill the transition from nature to freedom.

There are three distinctions between the principle of subjective purposiveness and the supersensible substrate. First, the former is an a priori principle of reflective judgment that regulates the free play of cognitive faculties in terms of the given intuitive representations, while the latter, as a rational concept, cannot apply directly to the empirical object but only to the higher cognitive faculties, such as understanding and the power of judgment. Second, the former is conscious in aesthetic reflection through the maintaining state of mind, and the purposiveness is suitable for the sensibility of the subject because the free play enhances “the sense of life of the subject” (KU 5: 204) or the mutual facilitation of understanding and imagination. However, in the dialectic of the aesthetic power of judgment, similar to the first two *Critiques*, the antinomy arises from reason’s demand with regard to the a priori principle of the power of judgment, the unconditioned for the given conditioned (see KU 5: 345). Thus, taste transcends sensible intuition and contemplative reflection and grounds its subjectively and aesthetically founded principle of purposiveness further in the intelligible objectively and necessarily demanded by reason from a metaphysical perspective. Just as the highest good is different from the moral law, the supersensible substrate is also different from the subjective purposiveness. Finally, the subjective purposiveness in the analytic regulates the suitability between the cognitive faculties on the one hand and the suitability between the appreciator and one special object on the other hand, while the suitability in dialectics is expanded — the idea of a supersensible substrate requires an accordance among the higher cognitive faculties, i.e., consistency of reason itself on the one hand and harmony between the whole of nature and freedom as the fundamental determination of human being.

The last question is as follows: how does beauty accomplish the systematic transition with the supersensible substrate that it looks toward? In the symbol section, Kant writes that in taste, the power of judgment

“sees itself, both on account of this inner possibility in the subject as well as on account of the outer possibility of a nature that corresponds to it, as related to something in the subject itself and outside of it, which is neither nature nor freedom, but which is connected with the ground of the latter, namely, the supersensible, in which the theoretical faculty is combined with the practical, in a mutual and unknown way, to form a unity” (KU 5: 353). In the introduction to the third *Critique*, Kant gives a clearer explanation of how the power of judgment functions as a transition: In cognition, the supersensible substratum is indicated by understanding but is left as undetermined. “The power of judgment, through its a priori principle for judging nature in accordance with possible particular laws for it, provides for its supersensible substratum (in us as well as outside us) determinability through the intellectual faculty. However, reason provides determination for the same substratum through its practical law a priori; and thus, the power of judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom” (KU 5: 196).

In cognition, we can obtain knowledge of empirical objects only when human discursive understanding combines with sensible intuitions, and we cannot know the whole nature as a system. Though understanding is spontaneous in terms of its legislative function in nature, it is not spontaneous enough to be independent of sensibility and to determine the particular parts by itself — only completely rational beings can cognize the whole nature as a whole (as the object of reason) through a faculty of intellectual intuition. Thus, how the supersensible substratum is determinable can then be transferred to another question: how spontaneous can the power of aesthetic judgment be, as a mediating phase between discursive and intuitive understanding? We can analyze its spontaneity by the following three points. First, regarding the contingency of the discursive understanding: In the usage of discursive understanding, the particular parts are contingently given by empirical intuition, while in taste, the aesthetic object is given in the experience, but this representation is only a trigger of the aesthetic judgment and not the whole aesthetic representation within the harmonious reflection. The latter consists of more stimulated related representations that should be creatively connected and generated by imagination — not under the prescription of understanding but with its own spontaneity. We do not wait for a contingent agreement of nature in its products and its particular laws but create a unification of representations for our own sake (but also not intentionally, only purposively). This spontaneity of the power of aesthetic power of judgment is not as perfect as the intuitive understanding that is independent of sensi-

bility but is already beyond the complete givenness of empirical intuition in cognition and that eliminates contingency to some degree.

Second, and related to the first point, regarding the relationship between the whole and parts: the discursive understanding can only progress from the parts to the whole, but the intuitive understanding goes from the whole to the parts. In the first case, the possibility of the whole depends upon the parts, while in the second, the possibility of the parts depends upon the whole. The aesthetic representation is neither a mechanical material whole as a product of the parts through the formal concept of understanding nor a thing in itself produced with purpose. It is an indeterminate manifold generated by the free play of imagination and understanding. As a changing and generating whole, on the one hand, it depends on the parts, but on the other hand, the possibility of meaningful parts also depends on the whole. This reciprocal dependence of the whole and the parts can be further explained by the mutual facilitating relationship between imagination and understanding in the free play. Although the power of aesthetic judgment is not as spontaneous as the faculty of intellectual intuition, in the self-maintaining free play of imagination and understanding, the former participates in the self-legislation of the power of judgment that it freely chooses, creates and combines in various representations, and the latter practices its unifying function not with a determined pure form but finds a lawfulness through interaction with imagination according to the representations that the imagination offers. In this sense, the power of aesthetic judgment can be seen as an organic power because of the reciprocal relationship between it as a whole and the different parts (imagination and understanding) and because of its self-generation and self-legislation in its application.

Third, regarding the a priori principle. The discursive understanding interprets nature as a mechanic whole, while the intellectual intuition explains the whole nature as a system and a product by means of causality in accordance with ends. Though both of them explain the object from the epistemological perspective, but the latter introduces a practical principle of purposiveness into the epistemological perspective. This introduction transfers the question of the cognition of the phenomenon of the object into the cognition of the origin and the state of its existence, by regarding the object as a product made by intelligible being with a proposed end. However, the power of judgment considers the aesthetic object neither under the determination of mechanical causality nor as a purposive product for a practical end — these judgments are all suspended — but as an accidentally formed unification of aesthetic representations that is suitable for the free play of imagination and understanding. Through the principle of purposiveness without purpose, the power of aesthetic



judgment does not serve any purpose but itself, which is also not presupposed but found in its application. The power of aesthetic judgment is not as spontaneous as the intuitive understanding that defines the end of an object from the outset and that can regard the object as a product according to the end, but it is spontaneous in the sense that it judges the object as suitable for the harmony of our mental state and regards the object as if it were arranged according to a practical end. In this scenario, the subjective purposiveness can be seen as a unification of theory and praxis as well as a transition from nature to freedom.