Kant: Notes on the *Critique of Judgment*

Third Moment: The Judgment of Taste is based on purposiveness without purpose.

What is a purpose?

Kant defines purpose as "the object of a concept insofar as we regard this concept as the object's cause (the real basis of its possibility); and the causality that a concept has with regard to its object is purposiveness (*forma finalis*). Hence we think of a purpose if we think not merely, say, of our cognition of the object, but instead of the object itself (its form, or its existence), as an effect that is possible only through a concept of that effect." [CJ §10 (64f)]

This makes it sound as if the concept brings the object into being. What does he have in mind?

Kant draws on Aristotle's theory of four causes. Everything, Aristotle says, aims at some end or goal which gives meaning and purpose to the thing. To understand a thing one must understand its function and goal. This is what he called its final cause (*forma finalis*). But it may also be helpful to understand how the goal or final cause is reached. The means of achieving its goal is what Aristotle called the means or the efficient cause of a thing.

By extending the notion of cause to the formal, material, efficient, and final aspects of a thing, Aristotle arrived at a theory of causation.

Consider, for example, the marble sculpture of a discus thrower. Any attempt to understand a thing begins with the questions, "What is it?" and "Why does it look the way it does?" According to Aristotle, the answer will always involve four "causes".

- **material**: because it's made of marble.
- **efficient**: because it was made in a particular way, e.g. by a sculptor with a hammer and chisel.
- **formal**: because it has the form it has, i.e. an athlete throwing a discus.
- **final**: because it has a purpose or goal, e.g. to present an ideal type, or to pay tribute to a great athlete, etc.

What is it for a thing to have a purpose?

A purpose comes about when the concept (essence) precedes the object or event (existence) and brings the object or event into existence in order to satisfy one's desire or interest.

When we regard something as if it had a purpose, but we have no particular purpose in mind, then, Kant says, the thing is experienced as having "purposiveness without purpose", an experience which produces a harmony of the cognitive faculties.

[We]...call objects, states of mind, or acts purposive even if their possibility does not necessarily presuppose the presentation of a purpose; we do this merely because we can explain and grasp them only if we assume that they are based on a causality [that operates] according to purposes, i.e. on a will that would have so arranged them in accordance with the presentation of a certain rule. Hence there can be a purposiveness without a purpose, insofar as we do not posit the causes of this form in a will, and yet can grasp the explanation of its possibility only by deriving it from a will. [CJ §10 (65)]

---

1 “The power of desire, insofar as it can be determined to act only by concepts, i.e. in conformity with the presentation of a purpose, would be the will.” [CJ §10 (65)]
Note that the thing experienced in this way cannot be regarded as having a purpose because if it did, the experience would involve a logical (conceptual) judgment and, being goal-directed, would not be disinterested. [CJ §11 (66)] In an aesthetic judgment of taste, the form of the object is connected with a feeling of harmony—a disinterested pleasure.

**Purposiveness** in aesthetic judgment can be a confusing and elusive notion.

An aesthetic judgment...refers the presentation, by which an object is given, solely to the subject (rather than a concept); it brings to our notice no characteristic of the object, but only the purposive form in the [way] the presentational powers (imagination and understanding) are determined in their engagement with the object. Indeed, the judgment is called aesthetic (in the broad sense of the term) precisely because the basis determining it is not a concept but the feeling (of the inner sense) of that accordance in the play of the mental powers insofar as it can only be sensed. [CJ §15 (75), emphases added; my insertions in curly brackets.]

Christian Wenzel argues that here and throughout this chapter, Kant attempts to relate
- forms of purposiveness (purposiveness without a purpose, subjective purposiveness, formal purposiveness²), and
- forms of objects or "purposiveness of form".

He describes Kant’s scheme as containing three stages of purposiveness, ranging from

- **P₁**: the object’s suitability for the cognitive faculties;
- **P₂**: the mutual reinforcement of Imagination and Understanding;
- **P₃**: purposiveness for cognition in general or “as such”.

![Diagram of Kant's scheme]

According to Kant, the feeling that occurs in the pure judgment of taste is neither sensuous nor intellectual. It is not due directly or solely to sensation, nor is it a simple cognition, although it is related indirectly to both.

**Sidebar: Kant’s Characterization of “Aesthetic” vs. “Sensual”**

1. The pleasure of the aesthetic, as opposed to the enjoyment of the senses, is a "refuge", according to Kant.
2. Sensuality, on the other hand, is natural, immediate [not earned], and “tyrannical”.
3. The aesthetic, which relies on a certain cultivation and disinterested contemplation, can free one from enslavement to the senses. It is a source of liberation from the natural instincts.

---

² Wenzel suggests these terms are used more or less synonymously by Kant. Christian Helmut Wenzel, *An Introduction to Kant’s Aesthetics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005 61f.
Fourth Moment: The Judgment of Taste is necessary.

Kant begins, in Aristotelian fashion, by considering what we are inclined to say or think about the “modality” of the judgment of taste and, based on this, surveys the possibilities:
1. for every representation, there is the possibility that it’s related to a pleasure;
2. for that which is agreeable, there is an actual pleasure;
3. for that which is beautiful, there is a necessary relation to pleasure.

What is the nature of this necessity?
1. It is not epistemic—it does not follow from a priori or empirical concepts.
2. It is not moral—not based on free will or rational reflection.
3. It is not logical—not the result of a logical inference.

Kant introduces another concept to account for the necessity of the JT—the exemplary. He argues that the necessity of the JT is neither a theoretical objective necessity which allows us to know (through cognition) that everyone will feel the same pleasure and liking for the beautiful object, nor is it a rule-governed practical objective necessity which determines the “pure rational will” in line with a moral obligation.

Rather, as a necessity that is thought in an aesthetic judgment, it can only be called exemplary, i.e., a necessity of the assent of everyone to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state. [CJ §18 (85)]

And while I take my judgment of taste to be universally valid, I don’t assume that everyone who is presented with the object will in fact experience the same pleasure.

Rather, I claim that everyone ought to judge and experience it in the same way. (Cf. CJ §19 (86) and Kant’s reference to this “conditional ‘ought’”. We assume assent, but have no recourse to rules or logic that would guarantee agreement.)

It’s in this sense that my pleasure stands in a necessary, i.e. “normative”, relation to the form of the object.

My judgment is an example of how one ought to experience the representation of the object. It’s as if it were an example of a universal rule that cannot be formulated or stated. [CJ §18 (85f)]

To what does this necessity apply? It may apply to the agreement (“assent”) of others and/or to the satisfaction.

What takes the place of the “missing rule”? Kant appeals here to “attunement” of the cognitive powers and the sensus communis—a non-cognitive “sense” that we feel. (Cf. Aristotle and inner sense theories for derivations of this notion.)

Timothy Quigley
Minor revisions 15 Feb 12