



Reason Suppresses Feelings? Or Moses Mendelssohn's Influence on Kant's Project of Three Critiques by [Douglas R McGaughey](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

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Reason Suppresses Feelings?¹ **Or** **Moses Mendelssohn's Influence on Kant's Project of Three Critiques**

Abstract: A common claim is that the proper functioning of reason requires the suppression of feelings because feelings are a debilitating, merely subjective pathology that cloud and/or distort clear thinking. Frequently, as well, it is claimed that Enlightenment reason's suppression of feelings is exemplified by Kant. This post argues to the contrary that for Kant's Critical Idealism feelings, rather than being a pathological hindrance to reason, are positive and ubiquitous to all aspects of reason as they, not by their content but by their function, motivate creativity and the assumption of moral responsibility for the decisions driving, and the actions deriving from, such creativity. Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* is examined as the source for the reflections that led to the three-element structure to Kant's project of three *Critiques*.

Introduction

There is a popular narrative, which claims that 1) Enlightenment Reason with its blind embrace of progress by means of instrumental reason (logical or technical rationality) is the source of all our problems and, that 2) the flag of its erroneous grasp of the human condition is its neglect, if not outright suppression, of feelings. Already among the Romantics of the early 19th C, it was claimed that Kant's great mistake was his ignoring of feelings. Not infrequently, one points to Kant's own lifestyle as an indicator that he viewed reason to be a control mechanism over the self – not unlike Plato's emphasis in the Republic (441e) on the central role of skilled reasoning/calculation (λογιστοκός) for controlling the appetites and passions/rage of the soul to achieve internal harmony, hence for Plato, “justice.” Kant's punctilious daily routine by which, it is said, one could set one's watch is taken to be an indicator of his exercising of cold, rational sovereignty over his feelings. However, both claims about Kant's Critical Idealism, namely, 1) a belief that reason is exclusively instrumental reason, which properly and consistently applied, will bring certain material and social progress, and 2) an insistence that it ignores feelings, are

¹ These reflections were inspired in part by Birgit Recki's „Der Kanon der reinen Vernunft (A795/B823-A832/B859). ‘... nichts mehr, als zwei Glaubensartikel?’” in G. Mohr and M. Willaschek, Immanuel Kant: Kritik der reinen Vernunft (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998): 597-616 and her *Ästhetik der Sitten. Der Affinität von ästhetischem Gefühl und praktischer Vernunft bei Kant* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2001). I owe thanks to James R. Cochrane for his, as always, careful reading and constructive suggestions.

profoundly false and distract from the value of Critical Idealism's potential contribution to the improvement of humanity and the fulfilment of humanity's obligation to the world.

Beyond Instrumental Reason

First, reason involves far more than mere instrumental reason according to Critical Idealism. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the first of three "critiques" of reason, Kant distinguishes among three parts to reason that are necessary for us to experience, understand, and act in the world as we do: theoretical reason, pure reason, and the canon of reason (morality). Pure reason consists of the non-sensuous, highest conditions of possibility for theoretical reason. It is "pure" not because it is superior or morally better but because it has no sensuous/perceptible elements to it. This is why the first critique is *not* simply a text on theoretical reason's epistemology (as many commentators seem to assume); its stated primary concern is to illuminate the regulative ideas (or necessary assumptions) of pure reason that are required for us to be able to understand appearances at all (theoretical reason) and to act morally responsibly (practical reason). Moreover, Kant's "Canon of Pure Reason" at the end of the first critique profiles the priority of what in the second *Critique* he will call practical reason over theoretical reason. For Kant, practical and pure reason go far beyond instrumental reason's calculating, predicting, manipulating, and controlling capabilities, which, in any case, is only a part of theoretical reason. In short, there is much more to reason than the pragmatic skill-set of instrumental reason.

In other words, although instrumental reason is what is taken to be the basis for the steady, material progress associated with Enlightenment Reason, according to Kant it is neither exhaustive of reason nor does it necessarily bring progress. He pointed out already in 1765 in his *Lectures on Morality* that the unusual causal agency of practical reason in principle gives us the power to destroy the earth,² and in the "Conflict of the Philosophical with the Legal Faculty" (in his *Conflict of the Faculties*), Kant not only rejects the notion of steady progress, but also that of steady decline or stagnation to claim that, while progress is not guaranteed, what is constant is change and that the task of progress is a *moral* task that involves those **inalienable human capacities** of reason that distinguish us as a species. In short, progress means moral progress for Kant, not merely material progress, and there are no guarantees for moral progress. Humanity's destructive power comes from the same source of humanity's creative potential, its freedom: the degree to which humanity exercises a causality not reducible to but complementary to the "blind" mechanical causality of the physical world (hence, autonomous freedom), which in turn gives us the ability to change intentionally the world in ways that the natural world on its own could never accomplish. Because reason involves far more than mere instrumental reason, it is simply incorrect and misleading to classify his understanding of reason as limited to the mere technical skills of calculation, prediction, manipulation, and control of phenomena frequently associated with and dismissed as "Enlightenment Reason."

² See *Vorlesung zur Moralphilosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2004): 177-180, especially 177: „Wenn die Freyheit nicht durch objective Regeln restringirt wird, so kommt die größte wilde Unordnung heraus, denn ist es ungewiß, ob nicht der Mensch seine Kräfte brauchen wird, sich, andere, und die ganze Natur zu destruieren, bei der Freyheit kann ich alle Regellosigkeit denken, wenn sie nicht objectiv necessitirt ist, diese objectiv necessitirenden Gründe müssen im Verstande liegen, die die Freyheit restringiren.“

On the Ubiquity of Feelings in Reason

Second, far from being absent, feelings are ubiquitous in Critical Idealism, and they have a positive role in conjunction with reason. In fact, Kant places feelings (to be sure, not all feelings) at the very core of theoretical reason as well as practical reason with the latter inseparable from the one, pure idea of reason, freedom, that is never directly, empirically manifest, but indirectly confirmed by humanity's creativity. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (§7) Kant speaks of this causality that is inalienable yet never directly perceived as the one "fact of reason," the creative freedom of practical reason. Although the "pure ideas of reason" by definition cannot be facts because they cannot appear in the senses, of the three (the other two are God and the enduring identity of the self, the soul), autonomous freedom is the closest that empirical experience comes to confirming. Kant writes: "... we can explain nothing but what ... can be given in some possible experience. But [*sic.*] freedom is a mere idea, the objective reality of which can in no way be established according to laws of nature ... It holds only as a necessary presupposition of reason ... [W]here determination by laws of nature ceases, there all *explanation* ceases as well, and nothing is left but *defense* ..." (*Groundwork*, IV, 459)

What does creative freedom have to do with feelings? In short, *awe* (*Bewunderung*) and *respect* (*Achtung*) for the physical and moral law! As he declares autonomous freedom to be the only "fact of reason," Kant quotes a famous passage from Juvenal: "sic volo, sic iubeo" ("that I will, that I command"). Be careful, though! Kant is not embracing my commanding whatever I capriciously might desire. Kant is underscoring the "goal oriented" (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) nature of human understanding and action as well as reminding us that the individual is responsible for both. He insists that what I will as well as the exercising of theoretical reason with its more narrow, pragmatic instrumental aspect are all subordinate to moral principles, which are only properly valid if the individual exercises her/his highest capacities to legislate the moral principle for her-/himself (in this sense, freedom is *auto-nomos*, that is, applying a law to itself). In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (AA V, 4*) Kant calls freedom the *ratio essendi* of moral laws because there can be no moral order without the ability to initiate an efficient causal sequence of events "above" and complementary to, but never "independent" of, nature. However, a moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom because the very reality of a moral law presupposes the necessary condition of possibility that is freedom for such a law to occur. Nonetheless, even the presence of a moral law is not *proof* for the reality of autonomous freedom.

To be sure, feelings do not have the same claim to understanding as what Kant in the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment*³ calls the two domains (*Gebiete*) of "nature and freedom," otherwise called "theoretical" reason and "practical" reason. Domains allow for understanding because they are governed by rules/laws. In contrast to the two "domains" of nature and freedom, Kant calls a "field" (*Feld*) those clearly and distinctly experienced phenomena that can have no rules/laws, and he calls a "territory" (*Boden*) that range of clear and distinct experience of phenomena for which we have not yet grasped rules/laws in the moment but for which, in principle, there are rules/laws capable of being discovered. In the case of Nature and Freedom, then, we have domains (*Gebiete*): Nature gives us its physical laws, but only humanity (as far as we know) is able to discern and to act on the basis of those invisible, moral laws that apply to its

³ See *Critique of Judgment*, section "II. On the Domain of Philosophy in General."

unique causal agency, by conforming to them consciously in self-legislation. Freedom, in contrast to the physical law, must give the moral law to itself in self-legislation because its law is not given by nature. If the laws of freedom were given by nature, then we would be mere automatons or mechanical toys as Kant points out in the second critique, *Critique of Judgment*.⁴

In contrast, dreams and feelings are fields (*Felde*) because they present us with phenomena that themselves have no rules/laws. Kant observes in the first critique (B 75) that “Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, ... [perceptions] without concepts are blind” [*Anschauungen* is misleadingly translated by Norman Kemp Smith and others as “intuition” when it is more accurately translated as “perceptions” – McGaughey]. Not unlike dreams, merely psychological feelings are “blind” because they provide us with sensations or phenomena but without access to conceptual schemes governed by laws in contrast to the case with nature and freedom. Dreams, Kant points out already in the first critique (B 520-521) as well as in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*⁵ and *Metaphysik Mrongovius*,⁶ provide us with clarity and distinctness of perception precisely without lawful order. Their value, then, is to remind us that simply “opening our eyes” (i.e., simply having the experience of clarity and distinctness) does not give us understanding. We must search out and then add a rule/law to the sensations if there is to be understanding, and that is precisely what one doesn’t and can’t do in the case of dreams. Similarly, though in a very different respect, psychological feelings provide us with sensations that are diffuse and capricious. However, unlike dreams that remind us that understanding requires not just clarity and distinctness of perception but also rules/law, *the crucial value of aesthetic feeling* (in contrast to mere psychological feelings) *is to provide us with motivation to seek law-governed understanding and to self-legislate moral principles to guide our decisions and actions. Aesthetic feelings involve respect and awe before the law* (both physical and moral law, but not the civic law *per se*, which is and *should be* subordinate to the moral law).

Moses Mendelssohn’s Influence on Kant’s Project of Three Critiques

In 1764 with his submission *Investigation of the Clarity of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality* (*Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral*), Kant placed second after Moses Mendelssohn in an essay contest hosted by the *Academie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*. Kant intensively engaged Mendelssohn’s work ever afterwards, and he corresponded with him. A text of perhaps singular significance for the development of Kant’s project of three critiques was Mendelssohn’s *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes* published in 1785 four years after Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, two years before the publication of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and five years before the publication of the *Critique of Judgment* (1790). In fact, Kant wrote an essay in 1786 on Mendelssohn’s *Morgenstunden* that was published as an attachment to Ludwig Heinrich Jakob’s *Prüfung der Mendelssohnschen Morgenstunden oder aller spekulativen Beweise für das Daseyn Gottes*. Clearly, Kant was intimately aware of Mendelssohn’s text.

⁴ See *ibid.*, Academy Edition, V: 101 and 147.

⁵ See *Prolegomena*, Academy Edition, IV: 290-291.

⁶ See *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, Academy Edition, XXIX: 885, 927.

Of particular importance for Kant's subsequent writing of the two additional critiques is Section VII of the *Morgenstunden*.⁷ Mendelssohn here speaks of knowledge, which experience directly only the appearances of things, as consisting of three parts: 1) the capacity for knowledge (*Erkenntnisvermögen*) as **material knowledge** of true/false judgments; 2) the capacity for endorsement (*Billigungsvermögen*) as **formal knowledge** of attraction/repulsion (*Lust/Unlust*);⁸ and 3) the capacity for **desire** (*Begehrungsvermögen*).⁹ Mendelssohn placed endorsement as attraction/repulsion (the *Lust/Unlust* of *Billigungsvermögen*) in the middle as the "connecting link" between material knowledge (*Erkenntnisvermögen*) and desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*). **Because endorsement has the "seed" of desire but is not yet desire (in short, it offers no content of its own, only attraction/repulsion), it is capable of recommending either material knowledge or the desires of wishful thinking.**¹⁰

For Mendelssohn the goals of these three capacities are all ultimately directed *outward* to the world of sense perception either to know the truth (by finding the appropriate concepts that correspond to the "unchanging" truth of things) or to pursue wishful thinking by bending things to conform to our desires. The capacity of endorsement (of attraction/repulsion or *Lust/Unlust*) stands ready in the middle between material knowledge and wishful thinking to serve as the neutral "seed" drawn upon by the other two capacities for achieving their ends. Again, for Mendelssohn, then, epistemology in all three forms is concerned with sense perception. The "how" of epistemology as an *internal, imperceptible* capacity is simply presupposed as if it is a *black box*.

⁷ Moses Mendelssohn, "VII. Fortsetzung. Streit des Idealisten mit dem Dualisten. Wahrheitstrieb und Billigungstrieb" in *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes* (Berlin: Hoffenberg, 2014): 43-50.

⁸ As his example of the capacity for endorsement as distinct from desire, Mendelssohn speaks of beauty, which "attracts us when we don't possess it and the desire to possess it is completely absent." (45)

⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46. It is certainly not insignificant that, in both the introduction published with the third critique as well as the longer introduction published separately, precisely at that point where Kant speaks of attraction/repulsion (*Lust/Unlust*) as the "bridge" connecting freedom and nature within the individual, he addresses the theme of "wishful thinking" (echoing Mendelssohn?!). However, rather than viewing wishful thinking as in tension with understanding (*Erkenntnis*), Kant suggests that wishing "... works toward the production of the object by means of his representation alone, from which he can however expect no success, because he is aware that his mechanical powers ... are either inadequate or ... impossible ... [Yet] they prove the causal relation of representations to their objects, which cannot be held back from striving to achieve their effect even by the consciousness of their inadequacy ... Why there is this tendency in our nature ... is an anthropological-teleological question. It appears that if we were not to be determined to the application of our powers until we had assured ourselves of the adequacy of our faculties for the production of an object, then these powers would remain largely unemployed. For ordinarily we learn to know our powers only by first trying them out. This illusion in empty wishes is therefore only the consequence of a beneficent arrangement in our nature." (*Critique of Judgment* AA V, 176-178*; see, as well, the first introduction AA XX, 231-232*)

Mendelssohn's shadow perhaps contributes to understanding, as well, why Kant can say at the end of the "Preface" to the third critique: "... with this [the *Critique of Judgment*] I bring my entire critical enterprise to an end." (AA V, 170) Critique goes beyond the perceptual to investigate the conditions of possibility for perception and responsible action in the first place. Mendelssohn provides a description of knowledge but not a critique of reason. Because there are only two lawful domains and because the two lawful orders are demonstrated in the third critique to be "united" by a common intellectual function (aesthetic judgment as the feeling of attraction/repulsion [*Lust/Unlust*]), Kant has exhaustively examined and articulated the dimension of reason that is necessary for us to understand and to act morally responsibly in the world.

Frequently today, Mendelssohn's *black box* is filled with "objective" psychological data or neurobiological reductions. In contrast, Kant's solution is to give a *functional* account of the *black box*. Apparently drawing on Mendelssohn's three capacities of knowledge, Kant engages in an *analytic* of the three capacities that constitute reason (theoretical, practical, and pure), and, although he employs the same three-fold division used by Mendelssohn, he renames the "connecting link" between theoretical reason (*Erkenntnis*) and practical reason's desire, the capacity of *reflecting, aesthetic judgment*. In the process, Kant's analytic of reason offers a *critique* by turning the spyglass around from looking outward to sense phenomena to look inwards to ask: What are the imperceptible conditions of possibility that are necessary for us to understand and to act in the world in the way that we do?

In his table of capacities of reason at the end of the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment*,¹¹ Kant identifies three faculties: "Cognitive Faculties" [that is, theoretical reason], "Feeling of Attraction and Repulsion" [that is, the *Lust/Unlust* of aesthetic judgment], and "Faculties of Desire" [that is, practical reason]. Precisely here in the third critique Kant has expanded the description of the cognitive capacity that he provided in the first and second critiques, concerned with understanding nature and exercising of autonomous freedom, respectively, to include an investigation of the "**feelings of attraction/repulsion**" (*Lust/Unlust*) in order to establish the place of practical reason in transcendental philosophy – about which he had expressed doubts in the first critique (see B 29, B 597-8, and B 833). He articulated the "problem" for practical reason in the footnote of the first critique at B 829*:

"All practical concepts relate to objects of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, that is, of pleasure and pain [*Lust und Unlust* or attraction and repulsion - McGaughey], and therefore, at least indirectly, to the objects of our feelings. But as feeling is not a faculty whereby we represent things, but lies outside our whole faculty of knowledge, the elements of our judgments so far as they relate to pleasure or pain, that is, the elements of practical judgments, do not belong to transcendental philosophy, which is exclusively concerned with pure a priori modes of knowledge."

There is a strong probability that Kant's second critique, *Critique of Practical Reason*, is a deliberate critique of Mendelssohn's "capacity for desire" (*Begehrungsvermögen*) in the sense that it is concerned with the transcendental conditions of possibility for desire rather than, as in Mendelssohn's own case, with the hypothetically pragmatic application of desire. The third critique, *Critique of Judgment*, moreover, can be also viewed as a critique of Mendelssohn's "capacity of endorsement" (*Billigungsvermögen*).

The centerpiece of the third critique can be found in Section "IV. On Judgment as an *a priori* Law-giving Capacity" in its "Introduction" (AA V, 179 f.): where Kant speaks of the difference between "determining" (*bestimmend*) and "reflecting" (*reflektierend*) judgment. In contrast to "determining judgment" that already possesses a universal for classifying a set of particular phenomena, "reflecting judgment" is the transcendental capacity of consciousness that is capable of seeking out the appropriate universal for a set of phenomena when we don't already possess.

¹¹ At the end of the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment* under "All the Faculties of the Mind."

In everyday language, a common occurrence of reflecting judgment is the situation in which I realize that “I don’t have the faintest idea what someone is talking about.” In order to understand, I must go searching for the appropriate concept(s), which involves a complete set or scheme of concepts and not just an isolated concept, in order to grasp the content of what has been said. However, for Kant, the critique of judgment is concerned not with *what* one is doing with the capacity of reflecting judgment but *how* one is able to do it. In other words, he shifts the focus, as in all critique, away from content claims to condition of possibility claims.

In the first critique, *Critique of Pure Reason*, he had addressed the *how* of determining judgment by theoretical reason that allows us to understand nature, generally. In order to understand, generally, I must go searching not only for the appropriate concept for a particular set of phenomena, but also I must invoke a complete set or scheme of concepts (not just an isolated concept) by selecting the appropriate elements from among what Kant calls the “Table of Categories of the Understanding” (B 106) that apply to the phenomena. In the everyday encounter with nature and, for those domains of nature where understanding is understood as conforming to physical laws already grasped, this selective, schematic process occurs on the basis of concepts that one already possesses, which is what Kant means by *determining judgment*. However, when it comes to unfamiliar phenomena of all kinds, it is more likely the case that one’s lack of understanding, or misunderstanding, is the consequence of one’s precisely not already possessing the appropriate categorical scheme. It is here that *reflecting judgment* is required. The third critique is the investigation of *how* reflecting judgment is possible.

It is possible to take Kant’s second critique, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, to be a critique of Mendelssohn’s “capacity for endorsement” (*Billigungsvermögen*) in the sense that it is concerned with the transcendental conditions of possibility for endorsement (attraction/repulsion; *Lust/Unlust*), not as in the case Mendelssohn with the hypothetically pragmatic application of endorsement to true/false judgments or wishful thinking. This critique of Mendelssohn’s “capacity of endorsement,” in turn solves two problems for Kant: 1) How and what role, does purposiveness play within the limits of reason, generally, and, having established that purposiveness, in fact, must *necessarily* be presupposed by both our understanding of nature and autonomous freedom, 2) how is it possible for the two systems of lawfulness that govern theoretical and practical reason, that is, physical and moral laws respectively, to be united into a single, unified totality, which is a necessary condition of possibility for reason (see “The Architectonic of Pure Reason” in the *Critique of Pure Reason* B 860 f.)?

Re: Purposiveness within the limits of reason: There are passages in which Kant contradicts the suggestion that nature generally, and not simply biology, is governed by purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*). One of those passages is the following that starts out by emphasizing the role of determining judgment when it comes to understanding nature. However, Kant makes it clear that, although theoretical reason, generally, is governed by determining judgment, **all determining judgments were once reflecting judgments:**

"In fact, although in the concurrence of perceptions with laws in accordance with universal concepts of nature (the categories [of the understanding – McGaughey]) we do not encounter the least effect on the feeling of pleasure in us nor can [we] encounter it, because here the understanding proceeds unintentionally, in accordance with its nature ...

[B]y contrast the discovered unifiability of two or more empirically heterogeneous laws of nature under a principle that comprehends them both is the ground of a very noticeable pleasure ... To be sure, **we no longer detect any noticeable pleasure in the comprehensibility of nature and the unity of its division into genera and species, by means of which alone empirical concepts are possible through which we cognize it in its particular laws; but it must certainly have been there in its time** [emphasis McGaughey] ... **It thus requires study to make us attentive to the purposiveness of nature for our understanding** ... so that if we succeed in this accord of such laws for our faculty of cognition, ... pleasure [over the coherent system of law – McGaughey] will be felt. Conversely, a representation of nature that foretold that even in the most minor investigation of the most common experience we would stumble on a heterogeneity in its laws that would make the unification of its particular laws under universal empirical ones impossible for our understanding would thoroughly displease us; because this would contradict the principle of the subjective-purposive specification of nature in its genera and our reflecting power of judgment with respect to the latter." (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* [Cambridge edition]: 73-74; AA V, 187-188)

In short, Kant recognizes purposiveness in nature generally, not just with respect to organic phenomena (see *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 727-728).

Re: the “Gap” between Nature and Freedom: Frequently, the notion of a gap between nature and freedom is taken as the basis for accusing Kant of an ontological dualism between “objectivity” and “subjectivity” (claimed not least to be the fundamental problem for Kant by Martin Heidegger in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*). However, given that the theme of a gap between nature and freedom occurs as part of the *critique* of judgment (already in Section II of the “Introduction,” AA V, 175-176), it ought be no surprise when it is pointed out that the concern is not with a gap between the transcendental ego and the empirical world (an internal/external gap) but a gap between theoretical and practical reason (an internal gap).¹² It is precisely the motivation of attraction/repulsion of aesthetic judgment that bridges the gap between the two lawful systems:

“Through the possibility of it’s a *priori* laws for nature[,] the understanding gives a proof that nature is cognized by us only as appearance, and hence at the same time an indication of its supersensible substratum; but it leaves this entirely undetermined. The power of judgment, through it’s a *priori* principle for judging nature in accordance with possible particular laws for it [theoretical reason], provides for its supersensible substratum (in us as well as outside us) determinability (*Bestimmbarkeit*) through the intellectual faculty. But reason provides determination for the same substratum through its practical law [of practical reason - McGaughey] *a priori*; and thus the power of judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature [theoretical reason] to that of the concept of freedom [practical reason].

¹² No one accuses a physicist of dualism when s/he points out that light requires two conflicting theories (wave and particle theories) in order to account for light as we experience it. One recognizes that the “gap” is that between two theories, which drives some physicists to seek for a “deeper unity” or a Theory of Everything (TOE). Kant’s TOE is reflecting, aesthetic judgment.

... [U]nderstanding ... contains the constitutive principles *a priori* for the faculty of cognition [*Erkenntnisvermögen*] (the theoretical cognition of nature); for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure [*Lust/Unlust of aesthetic judgment*] it is the power of judgment, independent of concepts and sensations that are related to the determination of the faculty of desire and could thereby be immediately practical; for the faculty of desire [*Begehrungsvermögen*] it is reason, which is practical without the mediation of any sort of pleasure, wherever it might come from, and determines for this faculty, as a higher faculty, the final end, which ... brings with it the pure intellectual satisfaction in the object. (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* [Cambridge edition]: 82; AA V, 196-197)

It surely appears as if Kant was stimulated to write two additional critiques in order to re-think the meaning of “the capacity for endorsement” (*Billigungsvermögen*) and “the capacity for desire” (*Begehrungsvermögen*) that he found in Mendelssohn’s *Morgenstunden*.

Two Problems with One Solution: Purposiveness and The Gap Between Freedom and Nature

Forty percent of the *Critique of Judgment* (Section II) is devoted to a critique of teleological judgment in organisms. Because the focus here is on “objective purposiveness” (“*objective Zweckmäßigkeit*”) in organic systems, one might come to the erroneous impression that the third critique is not concerned with a role of “purposiveness” in nature generally but only with a role of “purposiveness” in biological systems. However, as we have just seen, Kant proposes that the role of “purposiveness” for understanding (theoretical reason) and acting (practical reason) is by no means limited to organic phenomena.

The observable, apparent presence of teleology (purposiveness) in nature has been a central, Christian theological pillar since Christians began drawing on Philo of Alexandria’s *Logos* theology.¹³ Kant had already emphasized the (undermining) limits to the teleological argument for God in the first critique (B 648f), yet he also recognized that the “givenness” of conceptual and lawful “order” was a *necessary* presupposition for reason to be able to understand anything and to act at all.

However, the introduction to the third critique, with its observation of a “gap” between nature and freedom, points to a conundrum that apparently undermines the equally *necessary* presupposition of a systematic unity for understanding that Kant recognized already in the first critique:

“... [The] unity of reason always presupposes an idea, namely, that of the form of a whole of knowledge—a whole which is prior to the determinate knowledge of the parts and which contains the conditions that determine *a priori* for every part its position and relation to the other parts. This idea accordingly postulates a complete unity in the knowledge obtained by the understanding, by which this knowledge is to be not a mere

¹³ See David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Philo, of course, is so indebted to Plato that Jerome, apparently, coined the famous aphorism: “either Plato follows Philo or Philo Plato—so great is the similarity in doctrines and style.” (313, see as well, 4, 188, 208, and 338).

contingent aggregate, but a system connected according to necessary laws.” (B 673; see as well, B 672 and 675)

The third critique represents a solution to both the ubiquity of purposiveness and the need to bridge the gap between nature and freedom by introducing the notion of aesthetic judgment, which brings no new concept to either theoretical or practical reason but, nonetheless, allows us to see that both theoretical and practical *necessarily* are governed by a single transcendental capacity: reflecting judgment motivated by the feeling of attraction/repulsion (*Lust/Unlust*) that is aesthetic judgment.

Re: the solution to purposiveness. Purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) is a necessary assumption behind all understanding and acting because the latter both require coherent order for them to be possible in the first place. However, this necessity is a necessity that occurs within the limits, and is required by the limits, to reason itself. In short, presumption of **purposiveness is part of the heuristic strategy of reflecting, aesthetic judgment that is necessary for reason** to be what it is without being able, or having, to draw any certain conclusions about a divine origin to that purposiveness.

Re: the solution of the gap between nature and freedom. At the same time, reflecting, aesthetic judgment is the common capacity of reason that confirms the unity to both theoretical and practical reason although they are governed by different “purposiveness:” theoretical reason is governed by the purposiveness of physical laws; practical reason is governed by the purposiveness of moral laws.

On the Centrality of Feeling in Reason

One’s search (or refusal to search) for the appropriate scheme of concepts for understanding perplexing phenomena is motivated by the feeling of “attraction and repulsion,” not psychologically with respect to the pleasurable or onerous nature of an external task but transcendently by the attraction or repulsion with respect to the lawful order (physical or moral) that makes the task possible in the first place. Here, the feeling itself **provides no content** either conceptual or lawful **but a motivation** to seek **by means of reflecting judgment** a lawful content out of respect and awe for the physical and moral law. In other words, the attraction/repulsion in play here is directed inward to a feeling of respect (*Achtung*) and admiration (*Bewunderung*) that come with the assumption that there is a coherent conceptual scheme or a coherent system of laws that I can presuppose as I seek for the appropriate concept.

Feelings of attraction/repulsion in themselves are as *unknowable* as they are ubiquitous and capricious in experience. Kant writes in the first introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*: “It can be readily seen because they are not kinds of cognition ... that attraction or repulsion [*Lust/Unlust*] cannot be explained by themselves at all, and are felt, not understood; that one can, then, only skimpily explain them by means of the influence that a representation mediated by the feeling has on the activity of the mind.” (XX, 232) Nonetheless, this is by no means a “dissing” of feelings because both the physical objects and concepts/laws of theoretical reason as well as the autonomous freedom and moral laws of practical reason are also in themselves *unknowable*! **Knowledge requires a combination of appearances and universals** with the consequence that

appearances, incapable of being experienced as they are in themselves, **are capable both of encouraging efforts at understanding as well as of distorting understanding** by wild fantasy and delusion (*Schwärmerei*). The crucial requirement for proper understanding and responsible action is a commitment to the orders of nature and autonomous freedom.

When it comes to theoretical reason's understanding of nature, nature prescribes the imperceptible laws that we must grasp to understand nature's appearances. Here, physical laws represent a necessity that is demanded by nature although our understanding of those laws are subject to change.¹⁴ However, what is now taken to be determining judgments was once itself the product of reflecting judgment.

In contrast to theoretical reason, the "problem" for practical reason is that **no lawful phenomena necessarily determine what we should do**. Were there such, morality would be a heteronomous imposition on the individual that contradicts the very autonomous freedom that is the ground of morality. To be sure, the civic (social) law can be heteronomously imposed by a group, but the determination of the "rightness" or "wrongness" of the heteronomous civic law is dependent upon what Kant calls in the *Metaphysics of Morals* the "Doctrine of Virtue" (i.e., moral principles "higher" than the civic law). Here, though, the *should* of practical reason appears to violate the conditions of transcendental philosophy to the extent that Kant claimed in the "Refutation of Idealism" in the first critique (B 274-294) that internal experience can only occur under the conditions of external phenomena. Yet, what is necessary for practical reason is that the individual establish the rule for her-/himself (it is not "given" by nature or through the senses). Because this legislating of the law for one's self is possible only because humanity exercises a form of efficient causality (see Section III of the *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, written between the first and second critiques) found in nature nowhere else to the degree humanity experiences it, practical philosophy can succumb to enthusiasm and delusion (*Schwärmerei*) beyond the limits of reason to the very extent that freedom is "beyond" nature and capable of self-legislating its own laws.

Kant's third critique proposes that subjective feeling accompanies all of reason's capacities. The determining judgments that are demanded by nature for the exercising of theoretical reason, themselves, were originally reflecting judgments motivated by the "feeling of "attraction and repulsion" (*Lust/Unlust*) because the coherent scheme of concepts and the physical laws are themselves not "given" in the appearances to which they are applied. Our grasp of them involves an awe (*Bewunderung*) and respect (*Achtung*) for the coherent totality that is the system of physical laws, which make it possible for theoretical reason to invoke a system of *a priori* elements (concepts/laws) that we can *add to* the phenomena to understand them.

Yet, Kant goes further in the third critique to explicitly emphasize the role of reflecting judgment when it comes to biological phenomena in nature. Here, not only is theoretical reason driven by an original pleasure of reflecting judgment at an imperceptive "lawful order" of concepts/physical laws, but also the very understanding of biological processes requires that reflecting judgment attribute (!!!), but never is able to prove, teleological design in order to understand biological systems. Right at the core of this empirical, natural science is a reflecting judgment regarding purposiveness (not directly "given" by the phenomena) in order to govern

¹⁴ See for example, *Critique of Pure Reason* B 508, 641, 684, 708, 720, 786, 862.

understanding. An excellent example is the liver fluke that requires two external and unrelated hosts in order for it to complete its life-cycle. Biological systems require more than the assumption of lawfulness that is “given” by nature; they require the assumption of teleological purpose, which we must add, if we are to understand them. The capacity to grasp these “orders” involves both attraction and repulsion for the very order: 1) when it comes to theoretical reason the physical order is attractive because it furthers understanding; it is repulsive because it *appears* to involve God as an anthropomorphic “designer” of natural biological systems; 2) when it comes to practical reason the moral order is attractive because it indicates what we *should* do; it is repulsive because it can require us to do what *should* be done in painful rejection of our personal self-interest.¹⁵

Kant insists that it is inappropriate to attribute the teleological order to biological processes in order to argue for a divine designer. As he had pointed out in the first critique, the attribution of anthropomorphic predicates to God is a massive speculative leap beyond the limits of human reason. Whereas employment of the notion of natural, teleological systems is not only appropriate, but necessary, for us to understand nature alone, we must remain silent when it comes to ultimate explanations that attribute anthropomorphic characteristics analogically to God.

Following his investigation of “teleology in biology,” he concludes the third critique with an examination of practical reason’s priority over theoretical reason because it employs reflecting judgment (aesthetic feeling) to search out the moral law to govern the situation of one’s exercising of autonomous, creative freedom, responsibly. Reflecting, aesthetic judgment as attraction/repulsion (*Lust/Unlust*) anchors (but does not ground) practical reason in transcendental philosophy, and it does so by underscoring the ubiquitous presence of feeling throughout all forms of reason, the feeling of “respect for the moral law” analogous to the “respect for the physical law” in theoretical reason.

In short, feeling is not only NOT neglected or suppressed by, but, on the contrary, feeling is central and valuable to all activity of reason from theoretical, over aesthetic judgment, to practical reason. The differences among the faculties of cognition are NOT with respect to

¹⁵ Kant distinguishes respect (*Achtung*) for the law from inclination toward an object: “... duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law. For the object as the effect of the action I have in mind I can indeed have inclination, but never respect, precisely because it is merely an effect and not activity of a will ... Only what is connected with my will merely as ground, never as effect ... can be an object of respect and thus a command. Now, an action from duty is to separate off entirely the influence of inclination, and with it every object of the will; thus nothing remains for the will that could determine it except, objectively, the law and, subjectively, pure respect for this practical law, and hence the maxim of complying with such a law, even if it infringes on all my inclinations.” (*Groundwork* [Cambridge: CUP, 2013]: 16. It is this capacity of respect for the law that is directed by aesthetic judgment inwardly in respect for the law that allows Kant to claim alone for humanity the “ideal of beauty” as an individual and as a species because humanity appears alone to be capable of (even if not actually achieving) the ideal of perfection as an idea of duty. Here Kant distinguishes between “... an aesthetic idea (*ästhetische Normalidee*), which is a particular perception in the senses and the idea of reason (*Vernunftidee*)” that is, the “goal of humanity insofar as it cannot be represented in the senses, which happens in the judgment of its shape by means of effects in appearances ...; but [lies, rather] in the greatest purposiveness in the structure of the shape that would be the general standard of aesthetic judgment ... but [for which] no particular, isolated [individual thing] is adequate, but which lies merely in the idea of the one doing the judging ... ” [translation McGaughey] (*Critique of Judgment* V, 233)

eclipsing and/or denial of feeling on the part of theoretical reason whereas feeling is permitted a function in aesthetic judgment and practical reason.¹⁶ These feelings (not psychological feelings driven by sensuous pleasure and desires in the senses) are ubiquitous in reason, and it is neither possible nor desirable to suppress them.

Because of our enhanced destructive capabilities, we live in an age that more than ever needs the positive embrace of reason's feelings and the unflagging commitment to reflecting judgment to motivate our quest for understanding of the other that/who is perplexing to us. Furthermore, we need a conscious commitment to the dignity of the other who, like us, exercises autonomous freedom "above" but never separable from nature, as part of humanity's creative response to the challenges of the world.¹⁷

Above all, we need a commitment to feelings as what drives our desire to be human in light of our highest capacities, which includes the feeling of "respect for the lawful orders" that govern phenomena even when their implication of "purposiveness" in nature threatens our own autonomous, creative freedom by making us either material automatons of nature or marionettes of a divine puppeteer but also includes the "worthiness" of satisfaction when we fulfill our desires on the basis of a self-legislated, moral principle that, at times, can even require us to sacrifice our very self-interest. Caught between material determinism and divine predestination, our respect and awe for lawfulness (the feeling of attraction and repulsion at the core, but not grounding of, reason) empowers us to consciously assume our birthright in maturity as we seek to understand the world and to act morally responsibly because we can, not because we must.

Feeling motivates us in our response to the task represented by what Kant calls "our precarious position:"

"... which is to be firm even though there is nothing either in heaven, or on earth, from which she is suspended, or on which she relies. Here she is to prove her purity, as the sovereign legistatrix of her laws, not as the herald of those that an implanted sense, or who knows what tutelary nature whispers to her, which yet – though they may still be better than nothing at all – can one and all never make principles that reason dictates, and that must have their source, and with it at the same time their commanding repute, altogether completely a priori: to expect nothing from the inclination of a human being,

¹⁶ Aesthetic judgment functions as the original reflecting judgment required to search out physical laws, the experience of "free" beauty in nature (in contrast to the "appended" beauty experienced in human art, see Critique of Judgment §16), the power of attraction and repulsion in mathematical and dynamical sublimity that illuminates the illimitability and power of transcendental consciousness, as well as the role of desire in practical reason with its application of self-legislated laws to govern its autonomous reason all occur accompanied by feeling as a "respect" for, and "awe" in the face of lawfulness; hence, by no means to the exclusion of feeling! For the sake of brevity, this paper has focused on the role of feeling in theoretical and practical reason. However, feelings play a crucial role, as well, in judgments of "free" beauty in nature the mathematical and dynamical sublime presented by Kant in Books I and II the Part I of the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" in the third critique.

¹⁷ Kant formulates his notion of dignity owed to the other precisely in the individual's autonomous freedom that is inalienable, exercised only by the self, and can be exchanged for nothing else, hence, as a consequence, has no price (see *Groundwork* IV, 434-435) along with the other's respect for the moral law (see the "Remark" in the "Doctrine of Virtue" of the *Metaphysics of Morals* (VI, 467-468). In this "Remark," he rejects any role for mere "appearances" such as race, age, gender, aristocratic rank, strength or weakness, and status and prestige when it comes to establishment of the dignity owed to the other.

but everything from the authority of the law and the respect owed to it or, if not, condemn the human being to self-contempt and inner loathing.” (*Groundwork* [Cambridge: CUP, 2013]: 38; AA IV, 425-426)