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The free Regularity of Imagination and natural Teleology. Kant and Aesthetic Cognition

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Schönheit ist Vollkommenheit mit Freiheit.
Goethe[1]

The coherence of Kant's socalled third *Critique* is ambiguous despite the task that Kant undertakes to solve in it. As the title suggests and Kant's analyses show it is the aim of the work to determine the transcendental conditions of reflective judgment including the application of its principles on aesthetic and natural phenomena which do not fall under scientific investigations but which are still based on the cognitive powers of the mind. It is commonly agreed that an inner connection of the two parts of the work – the critique of aesthetic and teleological judgment respectively - is unlikely and that any attempt to argue that they form a unity is risqué[2]. Despite its relation to the powers of cognition (imagination and understanding) the reflective judgment excersises its activity in two respects, namely in relation to aesthetic phenomena – the beauty of nature and of fines arts – and in relation to organic nature. These phenomena belong to strictly separate areas. Judgments about organic nature are teleological in the sense that they project a concept of purpose at the basis of the object for cognitive reasons; they aim at knowledge of how organic processes work. Against that, the aesthetic judgment is – Kant says – indifferent to the knowledge of its object; it concerns the beauty of the object just focusing on the object's sensible form in so far as the judgment of this form occasions a feeling of delight in us. Whereas the teleological judgment thus claims to be *objective* (though Kant's critique shows that it fails to be so), the aesthetic judgment expresses the

[1] Goethe (1955): 21-23
[2] Höffe (2008): 7-8

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subjective affection we experience via the judgment of the (aesthetically relevant) form of the object.

It is this separation that I intend to question. I suggest that both aesthetic and teleological judgment respectively express ways of cognizing the world that do not exclude but rather supplement each other. More specifically, I argue that all through his third *Critique* Kant tries to keep separate what are really two different aspects of one and the same issue, namely the cognition of organic nature through a conceptual (scientific) and through a sensous (aesthetical) approach. This enterprise is controversial but among other things it contributes to support Kant's own intention with the third *Critique*, namely to bridge a gap between his theoretical and practical philosophy. It is the core issue of this work to show how the laws of freedom whose foundation is demonstrated in the socalled second *Critique* can be regarded as compatible with the laws of nature whose foundation is demonstrated in the socalled first *Critique*. Kant holds that for systematic reasons a concept of nature is needed that can unite the laws of nature with the laws of freedom[3]. It is this "Grund der Einheit"[4] aimed at by systematic philosophy that hardly can be compatible with the division of the third *Critique* in two separate parts that treat the aesthetical and respectively the teleological function of the reflective judgment. To be specific, I argue that it is not possible to separate what Kant calls the subjective, formal purposiveness from the objective, real purposiveness. Though beauty certainly is subjective in the sense that it causes delight by vitalizing our sensuous, corporeal nature, it is nevertheless founded on our judgment of the form of the object. Against that, Kant holds that the aesthetic qualities of the object are not objective properties or at least they are not significant for cognition. For example, we do not need to know what species an individual plant belongs under in order to estimate its beauty. Its climbing up the wall or its harmonious stature express a structure or a play that immediately appeals to our sensuality via our imagination and evokes delight as such. Kant thus distinguishes between subjective, formal and objective, cognitive properties.

[3] Kant (1952): 14. (1790): 176.
[4] Ibid.

However this distinction between aesthetical features and objective proporties is hardly tenable; it is based on the premises of Kant's transcendental philosophy that objectivity is constituted by sensible intuition and categories of understanding. In his theoretical philosophy Kant restricts the application of the transcendental apparatus to be applied just to the cognition of spatio-temporal entities and their causal connections - the material world. But in the third *Critique* he adresses aesthetic and organic phenomena and at the outset he suggests that a critique of the cognition of organic phenomena challenges the ontology implied by his own transcendental framework. In this paper I elaborate further on this challenge which Kant himself leaves behind. I suggest that the analytic of the beautiful contains concepts some of which resist a just transcendental justification because they also imply an objective reflection of the structure of the aesthetic object that connects the aesthetic attitude to the cognition of organic nature. The connecting point in the transition from the transcendental reflection to an objective reflection of aesthetic and organic phenomena will be Kant´s own concept of imagination (Germ. *Einbildungskraft*). I suggest that Kant's notion of imagination as an activity that works independently of understanding is intimately related to what he calls the "free formation of nature"[5]. Imagination is thus not just a power of the mind but it exhibits a regularity that makes it a kind of organ for cognizing the living character of organic objects. As such it supplies abstract understanding (Germ. '*Verstand*') by reuniting it with intuition.

In the "Analytic of the Beautiful" in the third *Critique* Kant tries to establish a position between a rationalist and an empiricist account of the judgment of taste. On the one side he rejects the rationalist view of beauty as a sensuous representation of the perfection of nature, a knowledge of nature's order based on the senses. On the other side he attempts to steer free of a purely empirical, physiological account represented by British empiricism (Burke; Hume). The problem that Kant sees in rationalist aesthetics is that it did not respect the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment. From Leibniz and Wolff to Baumgarten and Mendelsohn beauty had been treated as an

[5] Germ. "freie Bildung der Natur", cf. Kant (2009): §58. 248/B 249.

appendage to knowledge and though gradually being developed to become a discipline based on own independent rules for organising sensuous representations in for instance poetry, aesthetics in this tradition never detached definitively but remained a "gnoseologia inferior", a science based on the inferior cognitive organs, the senses, an "analogia rationis" (cf. Baumgarten). Kant joins this tradition but he takes the final step and construes a philosophical aesthetics. He accomplishes the emancipation of the aesthetic judgment from the domaine of knowledge by focusing on the sphere of sensuous representations and the internal structure they make up as objects of the cognitive powers. In continuation of Baumgarten Kant adresses the logic of imagination in the production of fine art and in contemplation of natural beauty. By trying to demonstrate the rationality of aesthetic the judgment but – unlike Baumarten - without ascribing knowledge claims to it Kant thinks that he can keep aesthetics apart from epistemology.

The emancipation of aesthetics from rationalism brings Kant near to empiricism. But though he approaches an empirical explanation of the aesthetic phenomenon by focusing on the sensuous representations he rejects an explanation that bases taste purely on pleasure as in British philosophy.[6] Burke's grounding of the aesthetic judgment on feeling (Engl. 'love') tends towards a psycho-physiological explanation. According to Kant Burke and other empiricist theories do not succeed in justifying the claim to universality which according to Kant characterizes the aesthetic judgment. In his analysis of taste Kant argues for a connection between feeling and judgement, i.e. for the rational foundation of the judgement of taste. Just as it is the task for ethics and epistemology to argue for universal validity claims in issues of morals and knowledge respectively, so a critique of taste must be undertaken to justify that they are universal too.

Unlike morals and and cognition that both base on concepts, taste is a matter of feeling but still not a private matter. In the judgment "The meadow is beautiul" the predicate is not related to the object but to the subject, i.e. feeling. This judgement is different from "the meadow is green" which relates the predicate to the object. But the relation between them is that the meadow

[6] Kant (2009): B 128 ff.

is estimated as beautiful because it is green. I am allowed to state the feeling of delight in a judgement about the meadow because there is something about the meadow – its "greenness" - that generates that feeling of pleasure. So the judgment claims that it is a certain fact that generates a certain feeling of pleasure (Germ. "*Wohlgefallen*"). Therefore Kant says: we should speak as if the judgment of taste were objective. Similarly when I say "this is a rose" I express a certain knowledge by subsuming a particular under a concept, a species. But by claiming "this rose is beautiful" I refer to a certain relation between its qualities and parts, e.g. its upright posture, the colours, shapes and arrangement of its leaves. These facts are certainly properties and some of them form a part and determine what species it belongs to, but Kant seems to mean that it is not as properties but qua making up a certain structure that they make the rose appear beautiful to me. However the question is if Kant is correct in distinguishing the aesthetic features as just subjective from the real, objective properties.

By excluding a merely empirical-physiological explanation of beauty Kant considers the rationality of the aesthetic judgement to be based on its universality. It expresses impartiality, it can be communicated and it claims universal consent. But by rejecting the conceptual foundation too Kant forms the concept of a "sensus communis" (Germ. "Gemeinsinn"). The "sensus communis" is responsible for our ability to judge universally about aesthetic phenomena independently of concepts. But this faculty has something obscure in it: how can feeling, a sense ('Sinn'), devoid of conceptual content contain something universal ? For further justification of that claim Kant resorts to the idea that beauty appears to the aesthetical attitude as the result of a certain harmonious interplay between imagination and understanding occasioned by the perception of certain objects. Thus to guarantee the universal validity of the aesthetic judgement Kant displaces focus from sense (Germ. 'Gemeinsinn') to the cognitive powers of the mind. Whereas knowledge originates in imagination that synthesises the empirical manifold to understanding which then forms a concept, the aesthetic phenomenon is constituted by a free interplay of these two faculties. Kant speaks about the

"free regularity of imagination"[7] and thereby he means that imagination functions relatively independently of but still in relation to understanding exclusively within the sphere of sensible representations. Consequently all knowing subjects can be expected to feel delight in similar objects in so far as these objects evoke the same interplay of the cognitive powers in all human beings. In this way Kant thinks that he can succeed in saving the universality of the aesthetic judgement without ascribing objective validity to it.

But the question is whether Kant is justified in ignoring the significance of the object and in denying the aesthetic judgement any kind of knowledge. For it is the form of the object that occasions the interplay of the cognitive powers in the mind. Not all objects are beautiful. Kant has his reasons for insisting on speaking objectively about the beautiful; he intends to avoid the psycho-physiological explanation. He wants to be able to distinguish clearly between feeling of delight and desire. Whereas desire originates in our sensuous nature, feeling is distinquished by being related to the cognitive faculties. In §9 – the key to the whole critique of taste - Kant explicitly distances himself from the empirical treatment; he argues that though the aesthetic judgement expresses delight, this feeling arises from the judgment. We do not estimate an object to be beautiful for private, abitrary reasons. It is the other way around: The rational estimation of the object precedes and conditions the feeling of pleasure.

If we follow the line of this argument, the feeling of delight is universal because it originates in cognitive powers that are common to all rational beings. To be more specific: In contrast to cognitive judgments whose predicates express a property, the judgment of taste focuses on its aesthetical features, i.e. its harmony, and this does not express knowledge. Let us see how Kant explains the idea of the play of imagination which characterizes the aesthetic attitude. Kant says: "And although in the apprehension of a given object of sense it [i.e. imagination] is tied down to a definite form of the object and, to that extent, does not enjoy free play […], still it is easy to conceive that the object may supply ready-made to the imagination just such a form of the arrangement of the manifold, as the imagination, if it were left to

[7] "Freie Gesetzmässigkeit der Einbildungskraft", cf. (2009): 99/B 69

itself, would freely project in harmony with the general conformity to law of the understanding"[8]. The freedom of imagination that characterizes an act of contemplation of a beautiful object of nature or fine art thus consists in producing sensuous representations independently of any law or concept of the object. Still imagination works regularly because the representations it produces exhibit some kind a coherence or regularity. To avoid a paradox here Kant explains the freedom of the aesthetic activity as an interplay between imagination and understanding[9]. For instance, whereas a biologist illustrating a species is bound by a concept, a poet is free to create infinitely many images by the sight of a red rose. Nevertheless the poem is not just an arbitrary association of word images. The free – creative - activity - must somehow be related to the form of the object. And that is exactly what the above cited passage says: The structure of the sensuous representations (the object) must correspond to the regular activity of the imagination (the subject). The question is just how.

It is not the ideal of fine arts to imitate a sensuous manifold; the artist creates his object and his creation of it - as well as the perception of it by a beholder - is accompanied by a vague idea of a law working behind the regularity of the representations. Beauty appears to the beholder in an *act* of contemplation or is *created* by an artist. There are thus subjective – transcendental - conditions for the appearance of the beautiful phenomenon. Though critical towards rationalist metaphysics, Kant keeps the rationalist idea that there is a supersensible aspect of beauty due to a characteristic structure that the judgment of taste expresses. But he traces this aspect back to the human mind considering it the product of a reflection on the activity of the cognitive powers. Kant distinguishes reflective judgment from determinant judgment. The latter is an ability to subsume a particular object under a given concept, a species or a law, and as such it expresses knowledge. Against that, reflective judgment does not dispose of concepts; it rises the cognitive attitude from a conceptual to a higher level; it synthezises particular laws or species of nature in order to form a transcendental notion (Germ. "Idee") of, say, a

[8] Kant (1952): 86. (1790): 241-242.
[9] Kant: (2009): 99-100/B 69; (1952): 86

hierarchy of species or a coherent system of natural laws. Reflective judgment disposes of a transcendental and heuristic idea of the ultimate unity of the world, a notion of totality that is meant to guide the scientific search for particular laws to explain empirical phenomena.

Bearing in mind Kant's distinction between concepts and notions (Germ. 'Ideen'), between understanding and reason, developed in his first *Crititique*, the reflective judgment in the third *Critique* works on the treshold of the level of reason whereas determinant judgment performs functions of understanding. The reflective judgment adresses particular phenomena by considering them purposive for the notion of a total world order, like pieces of a puzzle that make the puzzle fall into place, one might say. But Kant distinguishes between kinds of application of reflective judgment. For not only has purposiveness a logical use as a heuristic principle for the scientific organization of species in a hierarchy of natural purposes to a unified system. It also has a teleological application in relation to the cognition of objects that are characterized by self-organization (Germ. "Selbstzweck"). Finally it has an aesthetical use in relation to beauty and the sublime. The teleological and the aesthetical judgment are the issues in the third *Critique* where Kant tries to explain organic and aesthetic phenomena.

Reflective judgment brings Kant's theory of the aesthetic attitude to its end. For it is by basing the analysis of aesthetic and organic objects on reflective and not on determinant judgment that Kant can perform his critique and thereby reveal the cognitive claims of teleological and aesthetical judgments as illusionary: they simply confuse conceps with a notion. It is Kant's idea that a reflection on the harmonious interplay of imagination and understanding makes the notion of *purposiveness* at disposal for the aesthetic attitude as a substitute for the *concept* which the cognitive powers in vain seeks to add to the perception of the object. The regularity ("conformity to law") of the sensous manifold that appears as beauty is not an appearance of an underlying law of nature that can be conceptualized; it appears due to the apparent purposiveness of the way in which the activity of imagination is harmononiously conformed to understanding.

We have here the exact point where Kant distinguishes the aesthetic from the cognitive judgment. For whereas the latter expresses a concept of an object by subsumtion, the former focuses on features that make the object appear as if it were organized purposively. However, since Kant rejects a metaphysical or theological explanation of beauty as the sensuous appearance of the world harmony or a divine intelligence, he interprets the order that appears as natural beauty as an analogy to human purposive action, but only as an analogy since nature does not act consciously. The plant that climbs up the wall and the bird's 'singing' resemble but they are not expressions of purposive, i.e. conscious intentions. They are expressions of "purposiveness *without a purpose*".

But is Kant justified in explaining aesthetic phenomena within the framework of transcendental idealism; can he avoid a kind of realism? Surely, the autonomously working imagination provides us with the notion of human freedom. But on the other hand Kant cannot deny that it is the form of the object that gives rise to the free activity of imagination in the aesthetic contemplation by producing sensuous representations. That there is an objective condition is obvious in Kant´s treatment of fine arts. For interestingly enough Kant ascribes beauty to works of fine art only in so far as *nature itself* works in the creative act of the artist. Admittedly he distinquishes fine art from craft by its independence of any utility and conscious intention, i.e. concepts. The aesthetic quality of fine art consists in *freely* combined sensuous representations that please just as such. But though unbounded by concepts or laws, of what a thing should be, the genius who creates independently of conventional rules, traditions, taste and stile, is intimately joined to nature. Kant says: "*Genius* is the innate mental aptitude *(ingenium) through which* nature gives the rule to art"[10]. The quality of a work of fine art depends partly on the artist not organizing his work from his aesthetic ideas (concepts) too deliberately. It is precisely when he creates as if *nature* prescribed the rules to him that his work is distinguished by the freedom which makes it beautiful whereas a predominantly deliberate production makes the work similar to works of craft in which the particular object are

[10] Kant (1952): § 46, p. 168. (1790): 307.

determined by concepts. The poet creates freely but not arbitrarily when his creation imitates nature´s production and not just its products. The interesting point here is that fine arts can only be beautiful if they are natural and free at the same time. In fact, nature is conceived of as that which makes the creation free in the work of fine art. Consequently, freedom in the form of artistic creation must be regarded as a feature of nature appearing as beauty since natural beauty is paradigmatic and an ideal for the artist.

Several parts of Kant´s theory points in the direction of an ontological aspect of the aesthetic phenomenon. It is especially remarkable that Kant intended his *Critique of Judgement* to mediate between the two other *Critiques* . The following remark from the "Introduction" is significant as regards the concept of nature that Kant lays at the basis of an aesthetic and a teleological investigation: Apart from the mechanistic concept of nature based on natural science "[…] nature must also be capable of being regarded in such a way that in the conformity to law of its form it at least harmonizes with the possibility of the ends to be effectuated in it according to the laws of freedom"[11]. This sets the scene for speaking about *living* nature. At least a part of nature must be considered so that apart from mechanical laws, laws similar to the laws of freedom governs it. Organic nature, natural beauty, beauty of fine art and phenomena of crystallisation in inorganic nature are areas that can be conceived of as freedom prefigured in natural appearance.

As already argued, Kant connects the idea of freedom to nature through the idea of a purpose. Freedom in nature would then be a purposive process resembling human, intentional action. At first sight aesthetic phenomena like the harmonious structure of the rose, the climbing up the wall of the plant and the bird´s singing, produce delight in the beholder exactly because they are forms and processes that seems to be both purposive and free. Kant here hints at the rationalist interpretation of these phenomena as appearances of a supersensible intelligence working behind the surface of nature. Kant himself refuses to postulate the notion of a divine intention as an explanatory instance. He does not reject the reality of such an intelligence but he denies human beings the power of an "intellectual intuition" which could justify the

[11] Kant (1952): 14

notion. Purpose can only be accounted for in terms of human intentional actions. It involves consciousness and concepts. In Kant's definition purpose is "the object of a concept so far as this concept is regarded as the cause of the object (the real ground of its possibility)"[12]. A process is purposive when it is directed towards the actualisation of a concept (species) as its end. But observation gives no evidence for ascribing intentions to natural beings. They are not directed towards ends. Consequently there is no freedom in nature.

But Kant does seem ambiguous as regards imposing purposes on nature. There seems to be freedom-like feature in nature. In a final discussion of idealism versus realism of teleology Kant points to examples of leaps in natural processes. Nature seems to display "free formations" in the form of processes of crystallisation (snowflakes, ice-crystalls and the like) and in organic formations[13]. They are phenomena where quantitative changes, e.g. growth and change of temperature, result in qualitative changes (taking and changing form). They are leaps since they cannot be fully accounted for in a quantitative-mechanistic way. Still Kant shrinks from taking them seriously; firstly because freedom presupposes intended purposes, i.e. concepts which are foreign to the domains of natural science; secondly because according to Kant's own transcendental idealism the notion of purposiveness only perform a regulative function in the scientific research. Conversely, aesthetic phenomena resist such a conceptional determination. Their harmonious play or structure can be perceived in an extensive variety of different phenomena: in organic nature, fine arts, the playing of light in crystals, the harmonious shape of the human body regardless of their natural classification. The aesthetically relevant structures cut across species and classes and as such they are irrelevant to concepts.

But though Kant's point here is clear and apparently convincing the features that are grasped in the aesthetic attitude could still have an ontological foundation. The bird´s singing; the plants climbing up the wall and the change of form during he growth of a plant are all different ways in which different kind of beings express and actualize their specific nature. Whereas

[12] Kant (1952): 61. §10. (2009): 70/B 32
[13] Kant (1952): 217ff. (1790): 348 ff./§58

singing expresses animal nature, growth including change of form is a common property of organic nature; it belongs to their nature to be living. It could thus be an objection to Kant's separation of aesthetics from scientific cognition to argue that knowledge of organic and semi-organic entities (for example crystallisation) involves a development of our cognitive powers. Understanding and determinant judgment may not suffice to grasp the peculiarity of these phenomena. We need to vitalize our cognitive powers and Kant's analysis of aesthetical and teleological judgment could be regarded as the first step in the direction to let the perception of "free formations of nature" challenge our cognitive powers and to investigate their epistemological consequenses. Kant commences to take up this challenge though he finally shrinks back from it. In the second part of *Critique of Judgement* under the heading "Critique of Teleological Judgment" he examines the idea of a natural purpose in constitutive respect. His idea is that in contrast to mechanical-physical nature, organic nature seems to be characterized by self-organisation and self-production. It consists of free formations that grow and differentiate. The organic proces can be described as a complex interaction of interrelated parts and organs through which the whole individual produces and manintains itself by means of and in opposition to the surroundings. The organism as a whole exhibits self-activity which means that it is both cause and effect of itself[14]. A knowledge of organic nature thus seems to involve purpose, i.e. the concept of a "telos": its parts are organs through which the individual maintains itself.

Kant compares the teleological with a mechanistic explanation to examine the possibility of ascribing a constitutive function to the idea of a purpose in the cognition of organic nature. This investigation, however, turns out to the advantage of mechanicism since the assumption of a notion of a natural purpose would involve a projection of a divine intelligence onto nature. This would lead natural philosophy back to rationalism which presupposes man's capability of an "intellectual intuition", an ability to behold the supersensible foundation of nature. Such an assumption is groundless according to the empirically minded Kant.

[14] Kant (1952): 16. §64

Kant´s rejection of rationalism seems reasonable at first sight since it reserves a heuristic function for the teleological judgment: When dissecting an organism in biology or anatomy the researcer asks for the *purpose* when he comes across a hitherto unknown organ. But he gets the answer when he has found the proper *function* of the organ, i.e. what it accomplishes for other organs and for the organism as a whole. The organic processes are to be explained as causally interdependent functions according to mechanical and chemical laws. We need thus the notion of organic nature as a purposive whole, but only as a transcendental clue in our search for empirical, causal explanations. Nevertheless, Kant´s solution to the antinomy between mechanical and teleological explanations of organisms suffers from an reduction. The price for chosing the purely mechanistic explanation is that the essential difference between physical and organic nature are blurred. Then nature as a whole would function entirely according to mechanical and chemical laws. But if a consequent scientific attitude consists in explaining and not in explaining away given natural phenomena, it must aknowledge that the peculiarity of life phenomena makes a challenge to our cognitive powers. A consequence could be to say that in organic processes mechanical and teleological aspects are interwoven: the parts and organs are mutually dependent but they are also integrated in the proces of a whole individual which produces and upholds itself by means of these processes. Observing the interaction of the parts systematically we are led to the notion of their unity by forming the concept of an individual that actualises its species through its differentiation. There are thus purposes, self-actualisation, *in play* (i.e. not consciously) in these "free formations" of organic nature; the phenomena teach us that.

Maybe we actually do not dispose of the "intellectual intuition" that according to Kant is a precondition for being able to justify the use of teleological concepts in biological explanations. But instead of categorically denying ourselves its possibility we could begin by contemplating the living world with its endless variety and inexhaustible surplus of forms and individuals and take it as a challenge to our cognitive faculties. Then it may turn out to be sensible to consider the possibility of vitalizing our cognitive

powers in such a way that they become fit for grasping the living world as a dialectics between manifold and unity. For the purpose of making life intelligible imagination would play a central role. Imagination is not just an ability to synthezise a sense manifold to provide the observational basis for abstraction and idealisation in cognition. As Kant's analysis shows imagination contains potentials to work in conformity with living nature and thus to vitalize the conceptual unities of our knowledge to make the living, freedom-like aspects of organic objects intelligible. For organic beings are characterized by both freedom and necessity: "necessity" because they are bound to their species; but "freedom" because it belongs to their nature as living beings to take form and to actualise themselves in variety of ways.

Finally a concluding remark about the connection of the first and the second part of Kants *Critique of Judgement*. As already suggested, aesthetics could supply the cognition of organic nature if we accepts Kant's idea of a free regularity of imagination that corresponds with the "free formations of nature". Indeed Kant´s analysis of the judgment of taste seems far away from his natural teleology. But on a closer inspection it might not be so foreign to it after all: Kant maintained a gap between the aesthetic and the teleological judgment because he distinguished between objective properties and subjective, aesthetic features of objects. Focusing primarily on the subjective effect, the delight evoked by the perception of beautiful objects, he underestimated the significance of the fact that an objective arrangement – i.e. "the form of the object" and not just the powers of cognition - is the condition for the emergence of the feeling of delight. His reason for this underestimation is that an objective condition for the judgment of taste would either be raw sense impressions as claimed by empiricism or a supersensible, metaphysical (divine) being as in rationalism. However, these positions are both untenable, the former due to the failure to explain the structure (regularity) of the aesthetic phenomenon; the latter because it rests on a metaphysical assumption which can not be justified by rational means because the human intellect is not capable of an intellectual intuition.

Nevertheless Kant keeps a touch of understanding for an ontological determination of beauty. For example, the judgment "this is indeed a beautiful

woman" implies "a concept of what the thing is intended to be"[15]. The example of beauty as appearance of perfection presupposes a concept as the determining ground. The beholder is led to think that "in her form nature excellently portrays the ends present in the female figure"[16]. But though Kant here admits that concepts and norms often play a crucial part in our aesthtic judgments he regards "free beauty", i.e. works of fine art without purposes, as paradigmatic and he considers works of fine art – and natural objects as in the above mentioned example - that represent an ideal or norm (perfection) not "purely-aesthetic"[17]. According to Kant it is essential that beauty expresses freedom in the sense of being an appearance that pleases the senses unintendedly and for exclusively aesthetic reasons.

But the dethronement of the rationalistic notion of beauty as perfection that follows from ascribing a higher aesthetical quality to free beauty is not just due to Kant's general critical attitude towards the rationalist notion of purposes in nature. In fact Kant does not deny works of fine art all aesthetical quality just because the notion of perfection is metaphysically encumbered. His general devaluation of beauty as perfection in appearance is due to the fact that the motives of that kind of fine art must be limited to representations of man since man is the only being who by nature is intended for perfection. Man's rationality, including his ability to determine his ends by reason, makes him exist as an end in himself[18] in contrast to natural beings whose behaviour is bound to their specific character. In so far a representation of man's perfection can be produced in fine art it makes the only possible example of "ideal beauty"[19].

But this limitation of ideal beauty rests on an odd and hardly convincing argument. *Firstly*, Kant's idea of ideal beauty runs counter to his own warning against a confusion of the sensible with the intellegible sphere that the rationalists rendered themselves guilty of. On the premisses of Kant's philosophy it is impossible to bridge the gap between thinking and sensation

[15] Kant (1952): 173. (1790): 311. §48
[16] Ibid.
[17] Kant (1952): 73 (1790): 230.
[18] Kant (1952) 76-77. (1790): 233 §17
[19] Ibid.

("Denken" and "Sinnlichkeit")[20]. But obviously fine art, e.g. portraits, can represent the spiritual character of a person visually. And *secondly* and more importantly, as argued above there are good reasons for claiming that perfection is not totally absent in the processes of organic beings in general. For instance growth can not be conceived of just as a gradual (quantitative) increase in extent and weight; it has an aspect of form and differentiation directed towards a climax followed by stagnation and withering. Features of formation and direction towards an end in the form of a totally realized species in individual shape might thus not be adequately grasped or accounted for by general and abstract concepts of species. Concepts contain essences of organisms in the shape of thought. By contrast, the *living* and freedom-like features of organic beings are bound up with the sensously given appearance and that makes fine art a more suitable organ for conceiving of and expressing exactly the structures that characterize life. There is no reason for totally denying the living nature a kind of underlying purpose and perfection though in most of its species - excepts in human being – these specific principles do not work due to intentions and concepts like in conscious human life.

Kant´s general rejection of a connection between aesthetics and knowledge rests on the presupposition that the *free* formations in natural beings are incompatible with their being bound to the *necessity* of laws or species. But there seems to be a way of connecting them if it is admitted that the free formation of nature actually exist. Kant himself actually expressed guarded but unequivocal sympathy towards the "realism of the aesthetic finality of nature" by drawing attention to a apparent concordance between on the one side the organic world with its endless variety of species, forms, colours and shapes and on the other side our power of imagination. This concordance – says Kant - gives rise to "the plausible assumption that beneath the production of the beautiful there must lie a preconceived idea in the producing cause – that is to say an end acting in the interest of our imagination"[21]. This assumption makes it obvious to underline the objective

[20] Cf. *Critique of pure Reason*, "Introduction" where Kant speaks of "Verstand" and "Sinnlichkeit" as two distinct sources of knowledge. B 29

[21] Kant (152): 216-217. (1790): 347. § 58

aspect of the aesthetic judgment that the feeling of delight (Germ. "Wohlgefallen") is occasioned by the interplay between the cognitive powers, the interplay *which nature itself gives rise to*. The richness of nature is structured so that the mind which attempts to grasp it must activate a power that is congenial with it, namely imagination. Following this thread in Kant's thought, it would be reasonable to say this: the freedom that judgment connects to by reflecting on the interplay of the cognitive powers is not just the notion that stems from practical reason; before reflective judgment connects the aesthetic phenomenon to the realm of freedom at all, it finds it prefigured in nature as organic and semi-organic phenomena and in works of fine art.

However, the choice of realism would have subversive consequences for the whole project of the third *Critique*. The claim of an aesthetic knowledge and the ascribtion of a constitutive role to the idea of teleology in cognitive respect contradicts Kant's whole idea of a critique of judgment as just a critique and not a doctrine.[22] It is Kant's explicit view that the objects of the aesthetic and the teleological judgment - beauty and organic nature - do not make up a third realm besides the realms of nature and of freedom thematized in the theoretical and the practical philosophy respectively. The critique of both aesthetical and teleological judgment is meant to uncover the illusion that arises as a projection of principles taken from the sphere of the conscious human action onto nature where they are disguised as purpose and perfection. The reality that the third *Critique* treats is really the transcendental realm of practical philosophy. Beauty as the symbol of the good and organic nature are really (practical) purposiveness *without a purpose*.

But this conclusion is hardly compatible with Kant's original intention that the third *Critique* should bridge the gap between the first and the second *Critique*. Denying the two kinds of judgment any objective correlation, it is difficult to see that Kant has done justice to the intention stated in the "Introduction", namely to regard nature "in such a way that in the conformity to law of its form it at least harmonizes with the possibility of the ends to be

[22] Klemme, Heiner F.: "Einleitung" in: Kant, I: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Felix Meiner Verlag. Hamburg 2009. p. XXII.

effectuated in it according to the laws of freedom. – There must, therefore, be a ground of the unity of the supersensible that lies at the basis of nature […]"[23]. The unification of the two *Critiques* that Kant ends up completing in the third *Critique* ignores the ontological independence of one of its components, namely nature, wherefore the unification fails.

The fact that Kant ignores the ontological aspect is problematic since judgments actually state matters of fact on the basis of perception that has an objective correlate. The reason is *firstly* that Kant rejects rationalist metaphysics and the ability of empiricism to account for the structure of the aesthetic phenomenon. S*econdly,* the reason why he then connects the aesthetic perception to the transcendental idea of freedom is delicate and deserves a further explanation: Epistemologically the aesthetic phenomenon is based on the powers of cognition. We are told that imagination works independently of but still in concordance with understanding. This "free regularity" seems a paradox but it might be explained by an example: The interplay of the powers of cognition could be compared to an act of dancing in which the two partners coordinate their movements with the other, i.e. is dependent, *but* at the same time forms a unity with the other in such a way that making one pair their act – the dance - is free[24]. Illustrated by this analogy it is not difficult to understand why Kant can connect the aesthetic attitude to the idea of freedom and account for the characteristic delight we experience by the perception of beauty. But still, despite this convincing explanation of the subjective effect of the aesthetic attitude it remains to be explained what it is about the object that activates the cognitive powers in such a way that a certain aesthetic delight arises. In this paper I have tried to follow the objective path arguing that what Kant calls the aesthetic and teleological judgment have both ontological and epistemological conditions. Teleology contains concepts necessary for a distinct understanding of organic life.

[23] Kant (1952): 14.

[24] This analogy is proposed by Dieter Henrich to explain the apparent paradox of imagination: "The harmonious agreement of the cognitive powers, thus conceived, is playful in the particular sense: the mutual agreement comes about without coercion, and the two activities concur automatically. The play can thus be compared to a dance of two partners who harmonize in their movements without influencing each other and who enjoy their joint performance". Cf. Henrich (1992)

Aesthetic judgment supports this and proceeds further to show that an analysis of beauty reveals an ability to vitalize the cognitive powers and as such it can supply conceptual knowledge.

This justifies the following account for the interplay of the cognitive powers: By means of understanding we know the species of nature but only via concepts which we construe through *abstraction* from intuition. This leaves us with a divide between concepts and sensibly given objects, between thought and being. The divide is an epistemic problem for the cognition of organic beings since concepts are incapable of grasping life. Therefore to overcome the division, the concepts must be vitalized. This can be brought about by the activity of imagination through which concepts are *reunited* with sensuous intuition. In the beauty of nature the organic feature appears as such in the socalled "free formations" and in fine art knowledge is expressed vividly through images. Kant's accentuation of free beauty as the quality that distinguishes fine art aesthetically does not exclude cognition. On the contrary, the free beauty of a work of fine art shows that the work is objective in the sense that it is independent of subjective, i.e. deliberate and arbitrary, intentions because it represents *nature's* prescription of its rules through the artist.

In the aesthetic attiude we thus vitalize our abstract, rigid concepts with the life of the sensuous phenomenon through the creative power of imagination. This mutual rapproachment between understanding and sensation means that the free and regular play of imagination does not just produce a pleasant feeling by appealing to our sensible nature; combined with understanding imagination becomes an organ for cognising the organic being´s living self-actualisation. And the refreshment and strengthening of the feeling of life which the free and regular life of the living phenomenon causes in our sensible nature through the cooperation of our understanding and imagination is a subjective effect in our empirical character caused by a being which is more than just material. This idea that the experience of beauty contains both an objective, cognitive and a subjective, sensuous aspect is almost expressed by Goethe in his tentative definition of beauty from 1792: "The sight of the regular living in its highest activity and perfection which

urges us to reproduce it and which thereby makes us feel living and in the highest activity.[25]

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[25] My translation, pw. The defintion is reported by Brandes (1920) vol. II: 8. In Danish: "Synet af det lovbundet levende i dets største virksomhed og fuldkommenhed, der ægger os til genfrembringelse og bringer os til selv at føle os levende og i højeste aktivitet".