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Filosofía iberoamericana y aspectos diversos de la tolerancia
Ibero-American Philosophy and Varied Aspects of Tolerance

Augusto Castro, Victor J. Krebs
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Augusto Castro, Victor J. Krebs (editores)

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Av. Universitaria 1801, Lima 32, Perú

Teléfono: (51 1) 626-2650

Fax: (51 1) 626-2913

feditor@pucp.edu.pe

www.pucp.edu.pe/publicaciones

Coordinador general de la colección *Tolerancia* / *General Coordinator of the Toleration series*:
Miguel Giusti

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Mihaela C. Fistic | Washington College | EE.UU.

On Beauty, Concept Formation, and Toleration: A Reading
of Kant's Account of the Judgment of Taste

1. Introduction

My topic today is Kant's account of the experience of beauty as it comes out of his Critique of the Power of Judgment. My goal is threefold. First, I want to offer a reading of Kant's account of the experience of beauty in terms of concept formation. Second, I want to show that my reading of Kant's account makes sense of his claim that beauty is a symbol of the morally good. Third, and in connection with this relationship between beauty and the morally good, I want to suggest that, appearances notwithstanding, Kant views the experience of beauty as an exercise in toleration. As a point of terminology I should note that, more often than not, Kant describes the experience of beauty in terms of the judgment of taste. He also speaks of «the judging of the beautiful», and the text makes it clear that the two formulations are equivalent. Throughout the paper I will be using the expressions «experience of beauty», «judgment of taste», and «judgment of beauty» interchangeably.

The reading of Kant's view which I am about to offer comes out of my doctoral dissertation, published last year by Routledge. I should note that there has been a debate on the status of the judgment of taste in relation to cognition. Some of the scholars who have written recently on this topic are Henry Allison, Hannah Ginsborg, and Beatrice Longuenesse¹. To situate my own position within this debate, I find that my own view comes closest to that of Longuenesse.

Beauty, on Kant's view, is a matter of «purposiveness without end» and it is also, as Kant sometimes puts it, «without a concept». Puzzling as they may be, these characteristics, I suggest, can be made sense of on an interpretation of beauty in terms of concept formation². Such concept formation, as we shall see, has to do with creativity. To see beauty, on the view I am going to present, is to create a new image of a slice of the world; it is to exercise one's capacity to see things

¹ See GINSBORG, Hannah. «Aesthetic Judging and the Intentionality of Pleasure»; Longuenesse, Beatrice. «Kant's Theory of Judgment, and Judgments of Taste: On Henry Allison's *Kant's Theory of Taste*»; and finally: ALLISON, Henry. «Reply to the Comments of Longuenesse and Ginsborg», all published in *Inquiry*, 46, 2003.

² I am not the first to read Kant's view in these terms; see also CASSIRER, Ernst. *Kant's Life and Thought* and Ginsborg, Hannah. *The Role of Taste in Kant's Theory of Cognition*. In his *Kant's Theory of Taste*. Henry Allison describes the reflecting power of judgment in terms of concept formation, but refuses to acknowledge that the experience of beauty must be understood along the same lines.

ever differently, from new angles. We do not tire of beauty as long as we remain inquisitive and thus creative.

2. Purposiveness and the Reflecting Power of Judgment

To understand Kant's view of the connection between beauty and concept formation we need to begin with a brief detour through Kant's account of the power of judgment [*Urteilkraft*]. On Kant's view, this power of judgment is, in general, «the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal»³. The universal can be a rule, a principle, or a law. Kant views concepts as rules; subsuming an object (the particular) under a concept (the universal) is an application of our power of judgment. Now either we already have the rule, or we don't. If we do, the power of judgment applied to the case is «determining» [*bestimmend*]; if we don't, it is «reflecting» [*reflektierend*]. It is the latter type which concerns Kant in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. So the book is an attempt to explain our capacity to make judgments when faced with a particular for which we do not yet have a rule. Kant's question is how we come up in the first place with the rule under which we can then subsume this particular. We must, he thinks, have some other rule or principle which we follow when we come up with rules in our encounter with the world. Kant's solution to this puzzle is the notion of purposiveness.

The concept of purposiveness can be best understood by contrasting it with the concept of purpose. Consider the following example. On my desk I have a pile of plastic pieces: a dark gray square plastic slab at the bottom, another light gray square plastic slab on top, a coiled plastic string, and another longish plastic slab connected with the coil and lying on top of the light gray square. And now let me offer a different description: it is the result (or the object, as Kant would put it) of an idea in the mind of an engineer at Bell Phone; the engineer had in mind a tool which could allow people like me to communicate with other people all over the world. And now you know that what I have before me is a telephone. Suddenly, the longish plastic slab on top is not just a slab, but a receiver; it can capture my voice and transmit it down the coiled line, through the circuit inside the phone, and then on to the line in the wall. Now to be able to treat it as a telephone, I must view this object as the effect of the engineer's idea. As soon as I take that idea away, I am left with an odd arrangement of plastic pieces, produced on some assembly line. This idea is what Kant, with Aristotle, would identify as the «final cause» of the object. In Kant's own terminology, this idea is the *Zweck*, that is the end, the purpose of the object.

³ *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1790), Academy edition vol. 5. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer; translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Henceforth the citations from this text have the form: *KU*, §<section.paragraph>, Ak. <page no>; <translation page no>. «Intro» refers to the published Introduction. EE = *Erste Einleitung* refers to the First Introduction, translated in the same volume. *KU*, Intro. IV.1, Ak. 179; 66.

With this notion of end in mind, we can now move on to the distinction, which is at the heart of Kant's project in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* between an end or purpose (*Zweck*) and purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*). As we have just seen, in Kant's view an end is the instantiation of an idea which originated in the mind of an intelligent being, such as God or ourselves. In this light, we can easily regard artifacts, such as telephones, as ends, since they are the result of ideas in the mind of human beings. However, we cannot regard nature as having an end, either in part or as a whole, because we do not have knowledge of a mind behind it, such as God. The most we can say of objects or complexes of objects in nature is that they look designed, that they appear to accord with, to be in the style of (*mäßig*) an end or purpose⁴ (*Zweck*) and that they therefore show purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*). Now an object can have A) both an end and purposiveness or B) only purposiveness. (A) An object has both when the end can in principle be ascertained. This is the case of purposiveness with an end. And here we have two cases. 1) The first is when we know the end, as in the case of a telephone. 2) The second is when we don't know the end, but are reasonably confident that the object came about so as to meet a specific end; for example, I might see in an antique store an object, perhaps a household implement, whose use I do not know; yet while I do not know how to use the implement, I am sure it was conceived by a human being to meet a certain end⁵. (B) By contrast to a human artifact, a product of nature is such that we have no way of knowing whether it was designed by an intelligence. If it happens to look as if it were designed, then the most we can say is that it has the look of design, which is nothing else but purposiveness. Now this, in Kant's view, is the case with all nature when regarded from the human perspective: nature looks designed, yet it can never be proven to have a designer behind it.

3. Creativity and Concept Formation

Now I am in a position to start making a case for the connection between beauty and concept formation. Kant claims that the experience of beauty is made possible by our reflecting power of judgment. We have just seen that the reflecting power of judgment is exercised in those situations where we do not already possess a rule; indeed, the very task of the reflecting power of judgment is to come up with this rule. We have also seen that the reflecting power of judgment involves awareness of purposiveness and therefore awareness of design. So, as a type of reflecting power of judgment, the experience of beauty itself must have to do with design and with creating a new rule. To say that an object of nature is beautiful is, on Kant's

⁴ I offer here «purpose» as an alternative translation for *Zweck* so as to bring out the connection with purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), which is relevant at this point in my discussion. I nevertheless agree with the point made by the editor of the Cambridge translation in support of the choice of «end» over «purpose»: «purpose»: «purpose» for *Zweck* obscures the connection between Kant's aesthetics and his ethics (*KU*, Editor's Introduction, xlviiii).

⁵ I owe this example to Seyla Benhabib, who gave it in a different context during a course lecture at Harvard.

view, to express one's satisfaction at its looking designed in spite of the fact that, as far as one knows, the object has no determinable end. In Kant's terminology, the judgment of beauty is an expression of satisfaction, of disinterested pleasure when faced with purposiveness without an end⁶. Let me take an example. I'm on a hiking trip in the Rockies; I look at the mountains and the lake and I'm suddenly struck by how well everything fits together; it almost looks as if someone put all this together with something in mind. Of course I can't tell what the end might be, nor do I really think that there could be such an end, yet I cannot shake off the impression that the calm silence of the scene is saying something to me (Kant himself mentions «the cipher by means of which nature figuratively speaks to us in its beautiful forms»⁷).

At various points Kant's remarks suggest that he views the judgment of taste as unrelated to concepts. For example, he talks of satisfaction which is expected of everyone «without grounding it on a concept»⁸ and of «a universality that does not rest on concepts of objects»⁹; the very title of §6, with which he opens his discussion of this issue, is «The beautiful is that which, without concepts [*ohne Begriffe*], is represented as the object of a universal satisfaction»¹⁰.

However, a closer look at the text shows that what Kant rejects is not a relation to concepts, but rather the application of *definite* concepts: «[i]f one judges objects merely in accordance with concepts, then all representation of beauty is lost. Thus there can also be no rule in accordance with which someone could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful»¹¹. Another one of Kant's comments states the issue a little differently; he says that the beautiful «seems to be taken as the presentation of an *indeterminate concept* of the understanding [*Darstellung eines unbestimmten Verstandesbegriffs*]»¹². It is this idea of an indeterminate concept that, I suggest, should be understood in terms of concept formation. When I'm in the Rockies and I look around at the scenery, I leave behind what I learned from my geography book about mountains, lakes, and valleys. I concentrate on how the various parts of the scenery fit together. Perhaps I bring into focus the mountain and the lake: they strike me as fitting together. So, in a sense, I am forming a new concept, call it «mountlake», in that I see these elements (the mountain and the lake) as working towards a whole, as showing design. Now we don't give new names to every new way of looking at things which seems to us to reveal a design, but it is the case that we often re-slice the world in this way. In fact we do it much more often than we realize; the difference between regular experience and the appreciation of

⁶ For reasons of space I will not discuss in this paper the issue of disinterestedness in any detail.

⁷ *KU*, § 42.8, Ak. 301; 180.

⁸ *KU*, § 8.2, Ak. 214; 99.

⁹ *KU*, § 8.3, Ak. 214; 99-100.

¹⁰ *KU*, § 6, Ak. 211; 96.

¹¹ *KU*, § 8.6, Ak. 215; 101.

¹² *KU*, § 23.2, Ak. 244; 128.

beauty is that in the second case we are more likely to become aware of (and thus reflect on) the way our minds process reality and the way we react to this process. Indeed, the job of every artist is to interpret reality in a new and unexpected way, and the extent to which each of us is involved in reinterpreting the world in this way is the extent to which each of us is an artist.

There is a second way of interpreting the «indeterminate concept» mentioned by Kant. It is not the case that, every time we experience beauty, we put together two or more separate objects, such as a lake and a mountain. We sometimes simply look at one object, such as a rose (Kant's example), and find it beautiful¹³. On such occasions, I suggest, we replay concept formation, rather than form a new concept. Say I am looking at a rose. I already possess the concept of a rose; wilted or only budding, I can identify roses correctly when I encounter them in experience. But now I am looking at this object in front of me as if I didn't know what a rose was. Say the arrangement of the petals draws my attention; I concentrate on one of them, which has come a little apart. The features of the object now cluster around this one petal and its special shape. Suddenly the object conveys to me a particular kind of order which I have not experienced before; it has a new center of gravity. Then again I can shift my attention and look at the object differently, and the proportion between the stem and the flower now seems to convey an even better order.

Kant thinks of concepts as rules which unify identifying marks [*Merkmale*]¹⁴. Putting this together with the account which I have just given, to find that an object is beautiful is to reinvent, or try to reinvent, the rule by which its marks fit together. Or, perhaps even closer to our experience of beauty, it is to come up with several slightly different rules which make the marks fit together into a pattern, as in example above. Beautiful objects are those objects which invite such repeated reinvention; Kant says that «[w]e linger over the consideration of the beautiful because this consideration strengthens and reproduces itself...»¹⁵. At certain times we pay special attention to nature; we scan it with an attentive eye, searching for intelligent pattern. This search for form is self-sustaining—it is a sort of feedback loop—and this is why the reflecting power of judgment itself is a guide in our approach to nature.

¹³ *KU*, § 8.5, Ak. 215; 100.

¹⁴ «A perception that refers to the subject as a modification of its state is a sensation (*sensatio*); an objective perception is a cognition (*cognitio*). The latter is either an intuition or a concept (*intuitus vel conceptus*). The former is immediately related to the object and is singular; the latter is mediate, by means of a mark [*vermitteltst eines Merkmals*], which can be common to several things». (A320/B377; 398-9; underlined emphasis mine). Also, «[t]he schema of the triangle can never exist anywhere except in thought, and signifies a rule of the synthesis of the imagination with regard to pure shapes in space... The concept of a dog signifies a rule in accordance with which my imagination can specify the shape of a four-footed animal in general.» (A141/B180; 273; underlined emphasis mine).

¹⁵ *KU*, § 12.2, Ak. 222; 107.

Now all this may sound rather far from Kant's text. In particular, one might point out that the account of purposiveness in terms of design and the account of reflecting power of judgment in terms of coming up with a rule apply primarily to teleological, rather than to aesthetic judgments. In other words, the objection goes, what Kant says regarding the reflecting power of judgment may apply to nature as a whole in our search for species and genera, but not to particular objects in our assessment of their beauty. So I wish now to look at some passages which provide support for my interpretation. First, here is a passage in which Kant links purposiveness and the reflecting power of judgment to the experience of a particular object:

(1) In our power of judgment we perceive purposiveness insofar as it merely reflects upon a given object, whether in order to bring the empirical intuition of that object under some concept (it is indeterminate which) [auf irgendeinen Begriff (unbestimmt welchen) zu bringen] or in order to bring the laws which the concept itself contains under common principles. . . . We will shortly indicate the way in which the concept of the reflecting power of judgment, which makes possible the inner perception of a purposiveness of representations, can also be applied to the representation of the object as contained under it. Thus the power of judgment is properly technical; nature is represented technically only insofar as it conforms to that procedure of the power of judgment and makes it necessary (Marginal note, probably not Kant's: «We put, it is said, final causes into things, and do not as it were draw them out of their perception»)¹⁶.

The passage comes from the first in a sequence of four paragraphs in the First Introduction in which Kant describes purposiveness at the level of the object. Since the interpretation I propose comes out of this whole stretch of text, in what follows I will discuss, in order, all four paragraphs. For the sake of clarity I have numbered the four paragraphs correspondingly.

Let me start with a general explanation of the account of purposiveness offered by Kant in these four paragraphs. Both in the case of beauty and in the case of concept formation in general, we proceed with the assumption that there is a meaning to be read, a structure to be discerned in the object. This comes down to assuming that the object has a reason to it, a rationale. If only we knew that the objects of our experience were the creation of an intelligence, we would say they had an end. We don't know that they are indeed created by design. But being intelligences ourselves, we cannot help but assume that a meaning is there. So we hold the objects to the standard of our own thinking, the standard of meaningfulness; we say the objects ought to have a meaning. And so we read purposiveness, or finality, into objects, as the marginal note suggests¹⁷.

¹⁶ EE, VII.2, Ak. 20:220; 22-3; underlined emphasis mine.

¹⁷ Even if, as it appears, the note does not belong to Kant, I find that it is a good summary of Kant's position.

In the passage just quoted, Kant promises to explain purposiveness at the level of the object; he says he will show «shortly» how the reflecting power of judgment, and with it purposiveness, «can also be applied to the representation of the object». The promised account spans the next three paragraphs; It starts with a description of the faculties involved in the experience of an object:

(2) To every empirical concept, namely, there belong three actions of the self-active faculty of cognition: (1) the apprehension (*apprehensio*) [*Auffassung*] of the manifold of intuition; (2) the comprehension [*Zusammenfassung*], i.e. the synthetic unity of consciousness of this manifold in the concept of an object (*apperceptio comprehensiva*); (3) the presentation (*exhibitio*) [*Darstellung*] of the object corresponding to this concept in intuition. For the first action imagination is required, for the second understanding, for the third the power of judgment [*Urteilstkraft*], which, when it is an empirical concept that is at issue, would be the determining power of judgment¹⁸.

This passage, I suggest, describes the very activity of finding meaning. We first grasp the parts of an object (apprehension), we then put them together (comprehension) and finally regard them as a whole (presentation). It is this last task, presenting the whole, which belongs to the reflecting power of judgment, and it is here that meaning-finding takes place. This presentation is meaning finding because to see something as a whole is different from just seeing the parts. It is to see a structure which has a significance that goes beyond that of each part. This is what the marginal note, mentioned earlier, meant by saying that we read purposiveness, or finality, into the object rather than abstract it from perception. The meaning of the object emerges in virtue of our own interpretation; it is the theme that we find in it.

Moreover, the meaning arises as a result of holding the object against a standard. This standard, or ideal, is the proper functioning of our own thought mechanism or, as Kant puts it, the mutual agreement of understanding and imagination:

(3) But since in the mere reflection on a perception it is not a matter of a determinate concept, but in general only of reflecting on the *rule* concerning a perception *in behalf of the understanding*, as a *faculty of concepts*, it can readily be seen that in a merely reflecting judgment imagination and understanding are considered in the relation to each other in which they *must* stand in the power of judgment in general, as compared [*verglichen*] with the relation in which they actually [*wirklich*] stand in the case of a given perception.

(4) If, then, the form of a *given object* in *empirical intuition* is so constituted that the apprehension [*Auffassung*] of its manifold in the imagination agrees with the presentation [*Darstellung*] of a concept of the understanding (though which concept be undetermined) [*unbestimmt welches Begriffs*], then in mere reflection understanding and imagination *mutually agree* for the advancement of their business, and the

¹⁸ EE, VII.3, Ak. 20:220; 23.

object will be perceived as purposive merely for the power of judgment, hence the purposiveness itself will be considered as merely subjective; for which, further, no determinate concept of the object at all is required nor is one thereby generated, and the judgment itself is not a cognitive judgment. —Such a judgment is called an *aesthetic judgment of reflection*¹⁹.

Here are a few remarks about what Kant is saying here. First, notice the reference to concept formation in the first sentence of the third passage: the task of the power of judgment is to reflect on the rule of a perception, so as to help the understanding with its conceptual work. This reference to concept formation supports my earlier account of the reflective power of judgment in terms of searching for a rule which can unify various elements such that they gain the unity of meaning possessed by a concept. Second, I should point out that the third paragraph is ambiguous; the German «vergliehen» can be translated both as «by comparison» and as «in opposition». So the passage can be read as saying that in reflection we look only to the standard as opposed to a real object («in opposition»), or that we look both at the standard and at the real object, and compare the two («by comparison»). I read it as comparison, which fits better with the next (fourth) paragraph. This fourth paragraph describes a real (rather than ideal) case, the case in which the imagination and the understanding do agree so that one can make sense of the object. Notice the reference to the presentation of a concept; I take the presentation to refer to one of the several possible ways of organizing the manifold with which the imagination comes up and which it, as it were, presents to the understanding. This comparison, described in the third passage, introduces the idea of assessment —comparing how the faculties are working at this moment with how they ought to. This in turn implies that we do have an ideal of how they ought to work. Third, notice Kant's direct acknowledgment in the last sentence of the fourth paragraph that what he has just described is the aesthetic experience. Put together with the references to concept formation which I have pointed out earlier, this acknowledgment lends direct support to an account of beauty as related to the activity of forming a concept.

As I interpret Kant's account, the experience of beauty involves, on the one hand, expecting nature to show meaningful structure and, on the other hand, reacting with pleasure when such structure is found. To seek such structure is to compare what is with how it ought to be, with an ideal. It's as if we assumed that every object were the creation of an artist, and we proceeded to assess just how good her work was. The ideal against which we measure the work is how well we, each of us, can make sense of it. To make sense involves being able to understand how each part fits into the whole, how it relates to the other parts and what role it plays in the structure, so that the structure gains the meaning it has. To say that an object is purposive is to say that it looks as if it were created for us to make sense of it. It is purposive for, or meant for our thought. We, on the one hand, are the authors of the meaning, which implies that we add something to every pattern of experience,

¹⁹ EE VII.3-4, Ak 20:220-221; 23; all underlined emphasis mine.

namely our interpretation of how and why the content of our experience hangs together. Nature, on the other hand, lends itself to such meaning-finding²⁰.

It is remarkable that we human beings should assess nature in this way²¹ and that, moreover, we should react with pleasure to such assessment. We could have been such that we would have always accepted things just as they are and we could have been such that the presence or absence of intelligible structure would have left us cold—we could have been indifferent to whether or not we can make sense of the world. As it is, we do search for meaningful structure and we react with pleasure when we find it.

4. Beauty as Freedom

Leaving these problems aside, the interpretation of beauty in terms of concept re-formation illuminates an important claim which Kant makes in the Critique of the Power of Judgment, namely the claim that beauty is analogous to the morally good, among other things, in respect of freedom: «The freedom of the imagination (thus of the sensibility of our faculty) is represented in the judging of the beautiful as in accord with the lawfulness of the understanding (in the moral judgment the freedom of the will is conceived as the agreement of the latter with itself in accordance with universal laws of reason)»²². In what follows I will offer a reading of this claim in light of my interpretation of Kant's account of the judgment of taste.

Interpreted as concept re-formation, the experience of beauty is an exercise in creativity. The beautiful object surprises us with its richness and invites us to regard it in a new light. Here, it is the surprise which is the really striking element; for how come we can be thus surprised? In this light, the experience of beauty offers an insight into our own capacity to envisage matters in a new, unexpected way, a way which had escaped us before—beauty is a case study in the freedom, the spontaneity of our own thought. It is also an invitation to explore every situation in freedom rather than under whatever strictures may bind our thought at any given moment. And this is where the parallel with moral thinking comes in. Just as looking at an object in a matter-of-fact way, applying an already available concept, as Kant would put it, precludes the aesthetic experience, so looking at a certain situation which requires a moral decision in light of what has always been the case may preclude a genuinely moral act.

Beauty is a matter of revelation. To reform the concept of an object is to hold open the possibility of seeing it from a novel, unexpected and possibly more enlightening

²⁰ See also FLOYD, Juliet. «Heautonomy: Kant on Reflective Judgment and Systematicity». In *Kant's Aesthetics*, ed. Herman Parret, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997.

²¹ See here the opening paragraphs in KORSGAARD, Christine. *Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 1-2.

²² *KU*, § 59, Ak. 354; 228.

perspective. At every turn, we have the choice to stick to the way things have always been, to regard them as hopelessly predetermined by antecedent factors («Why bother trying to persuade this woman to snap out of drugs and turn her life around? She's lived too long in this muddle to be able to turn a new page»). And again, we may stop and reconsider. We may give the unexpected, even the unbelievable, a chance: we can let our thought take a new course, in the face of all evidence against it («All right, so she's been preying on the passers-by with her little spiel for who knows how long, and there's the guy who drops her off in the morning and picks her up at night—he probably pays her with a dose of crack for a day's worth of begging; but perhaps she is not hopeless, perhaps something can be done, perhaps with help she can, after all, turn a new page»). Beauty offers the revelation of the unexpected and of the power to envisage how things ought to be, rather than how they are. In this sense, it is a self-revelation—the discovery of one's own capacity to think otherwise. Moral thought, on Kant's view, is much similar, and here it is worth looking at his comments on Plato's *Republic* which he makes in the Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: there is no morality in the proper sense of the word in the absence of a vision of how things ought to be as contrasted to how they may have been all the way until now²³.

5. The Experience of Beauty as Toleration

There is a second way in which beauty constitutes a revelation, and here I am offering some thoughts on the parallel between the aesthetical and the ethical inspired by Kant's text rather than extracted from his argument for the communicability of taste. People have a desire to be understood, and in the process of explaining themselves they refine and firm up their own thoughts. Beauty is a case-study in the possibility of communication: one can look at an object in so many different ways that the possibility of sharing one's vision may come to seem very remote. Yet it is obvious that a meeting of the minds does happen. What is interesting about beauty is that a meeting of the minds happens when one has let one's own imagination fly—when one has thought in freedom. That communication does happen shows that the freedom of thought itself is not random—it works according to laws which seem to be shared by others. Beauty is a revelation of community as contrasted with solitude. Another person's understanding of, say, a novelist's vision of beauty is a concrete proof to all involved that solitude does not, after all, have to be our lot in life.

This has a parallel in moral thinking. I may intend to do good, but what if nobody else shares my views? Worse still, what if nobody else can share my vision of what ought to happen? What if all those around me are too tied down by the image of how things have always been to be capable of seeing how things could be changed for the better? Yet the human capacity to communicate beauty (consider not only

²³ Cf. A314-5/B371-2.

Shakespeare, and Homer, and Dante, but also the vast store of folk music, dance, and craft passed on for centuries) gives me some hope that others will be capable of sharing my vision of a better world. Note that the word here is «hope», not «certainty» —we have to put ourselves on the line with only so much going in our favor. Beauty is only the indication of a possibility.

There is yet more to this parallel between the capacity to appreciate beauty and the capacity to take a moral stance, for beauty is also the revelation of one's capacity to create on one's own an orderly account of the world —the issue of form. Images of beauty are not random; they have structure. This in turn shows that the play of imagination around a beautiful object may well be free, but is not random; freedom of the imagination does not involve the fall of all rules in favor of some drunken dance of shapes and colors flashing before one's eyes with no rhyme or reason (it is this order governing the aesthetic experience that Kant has in mind when he claims that, in the experience of beauty, the faculty of imagination as a whole is subsumed under the faculty of understanding.) Similarly, making a moral choice in freedom does not mean making a random choice. The will may be free, but it remains lawful²⁴. Beauty offers each of us a vivid, indeed visible example of the difference between servitude and freedom of thought. For until one has looked with one's own eyes, patiently and open-mindedly, the unmistakable experience of beauty simply does not occur; this is what Kant means when he says that the beautiful pleases immediately in reflecting intuition²⁵. Here is an example:

I'm with friends at the New York Museum of Modern Art. They rave about Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*. I honestly don't know what they find so great about it, but I don't want to look stupid so I, too, pretend to find the painting beautiful. After three years I go back and this time I find it fascinating; I stand before it for a long time and then start thinking about friends whom I should take there to see it.

On both occasions there is no doubt in my mind as to what happened: one time I lied in order to look sophisticated, while another time I discovered something which wasn't there for me before. And there is satisfaction in such discovery —my world has become richer. This aesthetic revelation of one's capacity to snap out of automatic thought and reaction into independent assessment parallels the revelation of one's capacity to make moral decisions on one's own rather than under the whip of outside orders or of one's own knee-jerk reactions to external impositions.

On my reading, Kant views the aesthetic experience as a type of concept formation, or rather concept reformation. Such concept reformation in turn involves creativity and freedom of thought. Moreover, Kant insists that when we judge beauty

²⁴ For an account of the lawfulness of the free will see KORSGAARD, Christine. «Morality as Freedom» and «Kant's Analysis of Obligation: The Argument of *Groundwork I*». In *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. See especially 162-166 and 62-64.

²⁵ Cf. *KU*, § 59.6, Ak. 353-4; 227.

we speak with what he calls a universal voice²⁶. At first blush Kant's account of the universality of the judgment of taste may seem rather authoritarian: one passes judgment on the beauty of an object and then one simply expects the others to agree. A second look proves matters to be different. We argue about beauty, and we think that such argument is meaningful²⁷. So our own expression of pleasure is not enough. As Kant points out in the Antinomy of Taste, we are not willing to give up such argument. The important point is that we expect a response, whether or not it is in agreement with our own judgment. Indeed we need such a response, for if we did not need it, we would not insist on distinguishing between cases where we do expect others to agree with us and cases where we do not expect such agreement.

The fact that we expect a response shows that in the aesthetic experience we are willing to open ourselves to dialogue. To have a genuine dialogue, one must tolerate another person's opinions; one must be willing to change one's own view, should it prove to be wrong. Not only that, but such dialogue involves one's thinking in freedom (the province both of aesthetics and ethics). The fact that we do engage in such dialogue of free thoughts regarding value in aesthetics should give us hope that we can have a similar dialogue in morals: the experience of beauty is an exercise in treating others as one's equals. In this sense, the experience of beauty is an exercise in toleration.

²⁶ Cf. *KU*, § 8, Ak. 216; 101.

²⁷ Cf. *KU*, § 56, Ak. 338; 214.