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Beauty and Rules:
Kant and Wittgenstein on the Cognitive Relevance of Aesthetics

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the relevance of rules in aesthetics by aligning and exploring the ways in which Kant and Wittgenstein treat the judgment of beauty. While both acknowledge that a subjective, felt response to something particular is an indispensable condition for a judgment of beauty, they also connect the judgment of beauty to the notion of a rule. However, the rules in question are not conceptual formulas, nor do they regulate the aesthetic or the artistic from without. Instead, the judgment of beauty itself is offered as an example of a rule. As such, the judgment of beauty provides a model of the kind of a judgment that may be treated as normative in spite of lacking a conceptual justification. For both Kant and Wittgenstein, the availability of such a subjectively based yet normative judgment is essential for making sense of cognition in general.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ludwig Wittgenstein is not known for a thorough philosophical discussion of beauty. If anything, he is famous for claiming that the word “beauty” is overused in aesthetics, and that the traditional

emphasis on beauty as a uniform property has only served to make the field of aesthetics confused (LC I:1). Wittgenstein recommends that we look instead at real aesthetic controversies and enquiries: “not what philosophers think it is like; but how e.g. musicians use ‘beautiful’, if they use it at all, in a discussion” (M 9:19). In Wittgenstein’s view, we will find words such as “right” and “correct” far more central in those discussions than “beauty” (LC I:8). But while the notion of beauty does not figure dominantly in Wittgenstein’s well-known lectures on aesthetics from 1938, in the recently published notes on his lectures delivered in Cambridge in 1933, Wittgenstein’s central ideas are expressed by reference to beauty. In these lectures, Wittgenstein makes a remark that is recorded by G.E. Moore as follows:

“Beautiful” ≠ “agreeable”, I said: but I omitted to say: Man might answer: Surely it is agreeable, or you wouldn’t go to hear it? But you can say: I’m not going, not because it isn’t agreeable, but because I can’t stand its greatness: i.e. if anything, it is disagreeable. (M 9:26.)

For any reader of Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Wittgenstein’s statement rings a familiar bell. This is because Kant’s analytic of the beautiful begins by an elucidation of beauty, not as a property of objects, but as a judgment that is qualitatively different from judgments of the agreeable. Kant argues that a judgment of beauty is founded upon a subjective response to a sensible manifold and, in this respect, resembles judgments of the agreeable. However, by contrast to judgments of the agreeable, a judgment of beauty is made with a special normative force, which Kant expresses by reference to the notion of a rule. While a judgment of beauty is not based on *conceptual* rules nor leads to them, Kant argues that the judgment itself is offered “as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce” (CPJ 5:237). Indeed, the judgment itself makes a claim to necessity: when making a judgment of beauty I claim that the relation between the form of the object and my pleasure is necessary and not merely actual as in the case of the agreeable (CPJ 5:213).

We find the same puzzling combination of commitments in Wittgenstein's work. On the one hand, Wittgenstein claims that "Perhaps the most important thing in connection to aesthetics is what may be called aesthetic reactions, e.g., discontent, discomfort, disgust" (LC II:10). These are personal responses to particular features of artworks or other objects of aesthetic appreciation, and what elicits my discontent may not invite the same response in you. And yet, just like Kant, Wittgenstein argues that judgments of beauty – or what he later simply calls aesthetic judgments – differ from judgments about the agreeable by making a claim to correctness or even necessity (M 9:13–9:26; LC I:8, II:3). Moreover, he illustrates the normativity of the judgments by reference to rules. Wittgenstein states: "If I hadn't learnt the rules I wouldn't be able to make the aesthetic judgment" (LC I:15). But rather than being conceptual rule-formulations, Wittgenstein suggests that the rules in question are given in the works of art and aesthetics judgments rather than dictated by an external source (LC I:12, 32).

In the following, I will address the tension between the two seemingly contradictory claims, namely, the claim evoking aesthetic norms and the claim about a personal response as a *sine qua non* of a judgment of beauty. I will start by exploring Kant's account of these two poles of judgments of beauty. I will then argue that Wittgenstein's treatment of aesthetic judgments follows quite faithfully Kant's account of beauty. Moreover, I will argue that Wittgenstein's reasons for treating aesthetic judgments as judgments that bring together the subjective and the normative are distinctly Kantian: for both, the judgment of beauty provides a model of the kind of a judgment that may be treated as normative in spite of lacking a conceptual justification. As such, it complements the account of cognition or understanding as the application of conceptual rules. But importantly, while Wittgenstein follows Kant in treating judgments of beauty as normative and as such implicating a need for criteria of correctness, Wittgenstein's version of the argument does not require the postulation of mental faculties with immutable *a priori* principles. By locating the rules

in practices rather than a fixed mental architecture, Wittgenstein offers a less demanding version of the normativist conception of a judgment of beauty.

II. KANT ON RULES IN COGNITION

Kant's critical project was to draw the limits of different types of judgment, determined by their respective sets of rules, principles, or laws. Indeed, according to Kant, for there to be an intelligible domain of reality at all, it must be governed by rules. For Kant, the paradigm example of a rule is a concept (CPR A106–108).¹ We can come to agreement on matters of empirical fact, because we all share the same mental architecture of conceptual categories of understanding, characterized by Kant as the faculty of rules (CPR A132). Similarly, every rational action is governed by a maxim that may, in turn, be tested against a formal principle (the Categorical Imperative). The specific twist of Kant's position, transcendental idealism, lies in the fact that we ourselves are the relevant lawgivers. Pure concepts of understanding and the principles of practical reason are not given to us by God or by nature, but originate in the structure of our own faculties. And this just means that the relevant rules are not regulative rules dictated from an external standpoint, but constitutive of the very possibility of thought. According to Kant, "We cannot think, we cannot use our understanding, except according to certain rules" (JL, 12). This overarching emphasis on rules stems from Kant's general concern with the validity of our judgments. The appeal to rules originating in our own faculties, allows him to disarm skepticism arising from empiricism as well as provide an account of free agency where the possibility of self-determination rests on our ability to give ourselves representations of rules that transcend our natural condition.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant sets out to give an account of the possibility of cognitive judgments about the facts of nature. In Kant's view, such judgments always bring together form and content. The form is given by the rules of understanding. The representational content is,

in turn, provided by our sensibility, characterized by Kant as mere receptivity (CPJ 5:205).

According to Kant, both elements are indispensable for the possibility of cognition. Without intuitions, concepts remain empty, he writes. And conversely, without concepts, intuitions remain blind (CPR A51). In a cognitive judgment, then, the sensible particular is subsumed under a determinate concept of understanding, the point being that the concept determines the particular under its scope.

However, the co-operation between understanding and sensibility, as the key faculties involved in cognition, is anything but peaceful. In his lectures on logic, Kant expresses the tension by reference to imagination as follows: “Imagination and understanding are two friends who cannot do without one another but cannot stand one another either, for one always harms the other. The more universal the understanding is in its rules, the more perfect it is, but if it wants to consider things *in concreto* then it absolutely cannot do without imagination” (LD-W 24:710).² While one can obtain rules from school or borrow them from others, by themselves the rules do not succeed in establishing the connection with sensible particulars. If anything, the representations derived from the senses resist or even harm the generalist efforts of the understanding. The trouble is that the concepts of understanding and the intuitions of sensibility are not relevantly alike to allow for a peaceful subsumption of the latter under the former, which creates the quarrel between the two faculties (Cf. CPR A133–138.)

Nevertheless, for a cognitive judgment to be possible, the manifold of sensible intuitions must be subsumed under a general rule, even if this maneuver violates the particularity of the intuition. Now, Kant acknowledges that understanding cannot accomplish this task by itself. While understanding can entertain conceptual rules *in abstracto*, it does not have the ability to apply those rules. All it can do is to try to justify the application of the original rule by reference to a new rule, and this will only lead to an infinite regress of rules on the application of rules (CPR A133, see CPJ 5:168–169). Hence, understanding needs help from another faculty, which Kant calls the power of

judgment, defining it as the faculty of subsuming sensible particulars under the concepts of understanding (CPR A132). The power of judgment lies between the understanding and the imagination as a mediator who takes its lead from concrete examples rather than abstract formulas. It is, as Kant writes, “a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced” (CPR A133).

In the *First Critique*, the power of judgment does not have much more than a supporting, if necessary, role in the formation of cognitive judgments. However, the role of the power of judgment in cognition is given a more substantial account in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, a work dedicated to the faculty that is supposed to bridge the gap between the conceptual rule and its particular instance. There, Kant’s self-appointed task is to show that the power of judgment itself belongs to the group of higher cognitive faculties, along with understanding and reason, by establishing its *a priori* principle (CPJ 5:168, 5:177). Only if we can show that the power of judgment is such a legitimate peace mediator, can we hope to build a bridge between the conceptual yearning of the understanding and the concrete sensible intuitions. In this respect, the overall goal of the *Third Critique* is to show that two quarreling friends may come together in nothing less than a harmonious, free play (CPJ 5:217–219).

III. KANT AND THE TWO POLES OF A JUDGMENT OF BEAUTY

The way in which Kant seeks to accomplish his task is by considering judgments that begin with the concrete sensible content that does not readily yield to the conceptual requirements of the understanding. Kant calls such judgments reflecting, contrasting them with determining judgments that proceed in the opposite order from the concept to the particular (CPJ 5:179). A reflecting judgment takes up, by means of the imagination, the represented manifold of intuitions for consideration *without* having a concept under which to subsume it ready at hand. For Kant, the paradigm example of reflecting judgments is a judgment of beauty, which is merely reflecting as it

does not rest on a concept nor leads to one (CPJ 5:211). While in a cognitive judgment I relate the representation by means of understanding to the object, in a judgment of beauty I relate the representation by means of imagination to my own subjective feeling of pleasure (CPJ 5:203). This is to say that the judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment but an aesthetic one (CPJ 5:203). It is a judgment whose determining ground is subjective, as it pertains to my personally felt pleasure in relation to the represented particular.

So, when I disinterestedly contemplate the pattern of wall paper, to use Kant's example of a free beauty, my imagination takes up the representation of the sensible intuition and presents it as a challenge to the understanding (CPJ 5:229). By this very challenge of a sensible particular defying the attempts of the understanding to subsume it under a concept, the imagination launches what Kant calls a free play between itself and understanding, subjectively experienced as pleasure (CPJ 5:217). But for Kant, a judgment of beauty is not *merely* subjective. While resting on a feeling, the judgment of beauty differs significantly from judgments about the agreeable that are merely subjective, resulting from empirically induced pleasures I experience when tasting good wine or chocolate. Hence, while both judgments of the agreeable and of beauty are aesthetic judgments, as they pertain to sensibility in relation to feelings, judgments of beauty carry with them a normative claim. I make them with a "universal voice", I demand "agreement from others" (CPJ 5:216, 5:213).

This difference between judgments of beauty and judgments of the agreeable reflects a deeper difference in their modality. In a judgment of the agreeable the connection between the particular smell or taste and my pleasure is contingent, as it is based on empirical laws of nature. However, in a judgment of beauty I claim that the relation between the form of the representation and my pleasure is *necessary* (CPJ 5:236–237). Given that the necessity of a judgment of beauty is not based on concepts (required of objective necessity), Kant calls the type of necessity exemplary. This is subjective necessity, which is presented as objective under the assumption that we all share

the same mental faculties (CPJ 5:237). That is, under the assumption that your faculties too will engage in harmonious play when you disinterestedly contemplate the form of the represented object.

It is important to note that while the judgment of beauty does not involve a determinate conceptual rule, understanding participates in the judgment according to its own essence, as a faculty of rules. Kant writes:

“Taste, as a subjective power of judgment, contains a principle of subsumption, not of intuitions under **concepts**, but of the **faculty** of intuitions or presentations (i.e. of the imagination) under the **faculty** of concepts (i.e. the understanding), insofar as the former **in its freedom** is in harmony with the latter **in its lawfulness**” (CPJ 5:287).

In a judgment of beauty, imagination is set free from the constraint of determinate concepts. Yet, the judgment of beauty “must be able to be universally communicated” even in the absence of a concept adequate to capture the sensible content (CPJ 5:217). This requirement of communicability makes it important for Kant to sustain the connection to understanding. While the understanding does not bring a determinate concept into the judgment, it must still “agree” with the imagination. This agreement, occurring in the free play of the faculties, is a subjective yet necessary condition for “cognition in general” (CPJ 5:217–218). Accordingly, the pleasure I feel in the judgment and indeed in its communicability is not merely an empirical or statistical phenomenon, but expected of everyone (CPJ 5:218).³

So what Kant seeks to do is to get to the bottom of the difference between the subjective but normative judgments of beauty and merely subjective judgments about the agreeable. He wants to show that in spite of its subjective ground in my personally felt pleasure, I have the right to treat judgments of beauty as universally valid and demand agreement from others. And it is not only the judgment of beauty that is at stake here. For what Kant is ultimately after is reassurance of our right to “think of the particular as contained under the universal” when the fit between the universal, i.e.,

the concept of understanding, and the particular cannot be justified by appeal to further concepts (CPJ 5:179, see 5:169). As I understand it, the goal is to show that a cognitive judgment does not have to remain paralyzed in the face of the infinite regress of conceptual rules on the application of rules and that the intuition and concept may be united, not by a further rule, but by a *feeling* of appropriateness – a feeling that finds its paradigmatic instance in a judgment of beauty as a merely reflecting judgment. For it is precisely the kind of judgment that brings together understanding and imagination in a nonconceptual yet normative manner and therefore is, as Kant writes, “requisite for possible cognitions in general” (CPJ 5:290). Without such a blind (i.e. nonconceptual) judgment we would either launch on the aforementioned infinite regress or else fall back on a naturalistic model of cognition that, for Kant, cannot account for the normativity involved in cognition.⁴

IV. KANT AND THE RULE I CANNOT PRODUCE

So the judgment of beauty makes a claim to necessity in spite of having no conceptual ground. Now, in Kant’s system, what grounds a claim to necessity and thereby justifies the normative force of the judgment in question is always an *a priori* principle (CPR A106). In the case of ordinary cognitive judgments, the *a priori* foundation is given in the pure categories of understanding, but given Kant’s insistence on the nonconceptuality of a judgment of beauty, such a conceptual foundation will not do. What, then, can ground the normative force of the judgment of beauty?

Kant addresses the question most explicitly in his Antinomy of Taste. Here, the two seemingly contradictory statements making up the Antinomy give voice to the two poles of a judgment of beauty, the subjective and the normative. The thesis claims that “The judgment of taste is not based on concepts, for otherwise it would be possible to dispute about it (decide it by means of proofs)”; whereas the antithesis insists that “The judgment of taste is based on concepts, for otherwise, despite its variety, it would not even be possible to argue about it (to lay claim to the

necessary assent of others to this judgment)” (CPJ 5:338). According to Kant, the resolution to the seeming contradiction arises from the insight that the term “concept” is used in two different senses in the thesis and antithesis. While the thesis assumes that the concept would have to be a determinate conceptual rule (already excluded by Kant’s analysis), the thesis correctly acknowledges that the universal validity of a judgment of beauty (also taken for granted by Kant) stands in need of some kind of a ground. Hence, Kant proposes the following resolution:

“The judgment of taste must be related to some sort of concept, for otherwise it could not lay claim to necessary validity for everyone at all. But it need not on that account be demonstrable **from** a concept, because a concept can be either determinable or else in itself indeterminate and also indeterminable” (CPJ 5:339).

Kant’s point is that the concept involved in a pure judgment of taste is not a determinate concept that corresponds to the objective predicates of the sensible intuition. Rather, the concept providing the necessary ground for the universal validity of the judgment, is a concept that is “in itself indeterminate and also indeterminable” (CPJ 5:339).

Kant’s own explication of this conclusion is likely to obscure rather than explain the matter, because he explains the notion of an indeterminable concept by connecting it to the “transcendental concept of reason of the supersensible” (CPJ 5:339). Henry Allison has argued that the indeterminable concept in question is the concept of beauty itself. Beauty is, as Kant states, “nothing by itself, without relation to the feeling of the subject” (CPJ 5:218).⁵ It is not a property of the object even if the surface grammar of statements about beauty makes it look like one (CPJ 5:187, 5:228). This is to say that the concept of beauty is neither a determinate nor a determinable concept. Rather, the judgment of beauty is a judgment about the necessary relation between the form of the representation and my feeling of pleasure to which the purposiveness of the representation for the faculties of imagination and understanding gives rise. Hence, Allison argues that the indeterminable concept in question is beauty itself understood in accordance with Kant’s

definition given at the end of the Third Moment. There Kant states: “**Beauty** is the form of the **purposiveness** of an object, insofar as it is perceived in it **without representation of an end**” (CPJ 5:236).⁶

It is here, in the notion of purposiveness, that we find the connection between reflecting judgment and the notion of a rule. For purposiveness, according to Kant, is “the causality of a concept with regard to its object”, meaning that the conceptual rule grounds the possibility of the object (CPJ 5:220). Moreover, Kant argues that we can recognize purposiveness even when there is no purpose expressible by reference to a determinate concept. For we can notice the purposiveness of a form subjectively, by reflection, rather than objectively by means of a concept (CPJ 5:192, 5:220). This means to see the object as if it were arranged in accordance with the representation of a rule even when we cannot state what that rule is. And this is precisely what happens when we make a judgment of beauty: while there is no purpose explicable by reference to a determinate concept, the manifold of intuitions judged to be beautiful still has the *form* of purposiveness, as if there were a rule grounding the possibility of the object. Given that in the judgment of beauty I judge the purposiveness of the form of the object subjectively and not objectively by means of concepts, the standard to which I refer arises with the judgment itself. I judge my own response to the form to be universally communicable. In other words, I offer my judgment of beauty “as an example of a universal rule which one cannot produce” (CPJ 5:237).

Indeed, Kant connects the very conceivability of the object to its purposiveness by writing: “An object or a state of mind, or even an action ... even if its possibility does not necessarily presuppose the representation of an end, is called purposive merely because its possibility can only be explained and conceived by us insofar as we assume as its ground a causality in accordance with ends; i.e. a will that has arranged it so in accordance with a representation of a certain rule” (CPJ 5:220). Given that purposiveness carries with it a reference to such intentional causality, Kant’s mention of the supersensible becomes understandable. For the kind of causality in question

corresponds to Kant's notion of freedom understood in the sense of self-determination, presupposed to make sense of rational action (cf. G 4:446–447, 4:452).

Now, the form of purposiveness is not a property of the object, but arises from the power of judgment itself in its reflective use governed by its *a priori* principle of formal purposiveness (CPJ 5:183). This principle governs the way in which we must approach certain objects for them to be intelligible for us, as if they contained a lawful unity, even if we cannot establish such unity from the conceptual perspective of the understanding. Indeed, Kant defines the aesthetic power of judgment both as a faculty for judging formal purposiveness and as a “special faculty for judging things *in accordance with a rule but not in accordance with concepts*” (CPJ 5:194). But this just means that there is *kind* of a rule involved in the judgment of beauty. It is just that this rule cannot be conceptual, dictated by an external authority (like the understanding), but is given in the exemplary instances of judgments of beauty. The judgments themselves are given *as rules* that one cannot produce in the form of conceptual reformulations, but yet acquire their normative force as rules from the principle of purposiveness that grounds the legitimacy of their claim to necessity.

V. KANT ON THE RULES OF ART

The two poles of rule-governedness and freedom from rules are echoed in Kant's discussion of the arts. Kant writes: “In a product of art one must be aware of it as art, and not nature; yet the purposiveness of its form must still seem to be as free from all constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a mere product of nature” (CPJ 5:306). To be perceived as a work of art, an object must be seen as the result of rational consideration and in this sense *as if* designed in accordance with the representation of a rule. Hence, according to Kant, “every art presupposes rules which first lay down the foundation by means of which a product that is to be called artistic is first represented as possible” (CPJ 5:307). Moreover, it is precisely rational consideration, i.e., the ability of the human

will to escape determination caused by external stimuli and act on the basis of a representation of a rule, which establishes art's connection to freedom. In Kant's words, "[b]y right, only production through freedom, i.e., through a capacity for choice that grounds its actions in reason, should be called art" (CPJ 5:303). Without the formal connection to intentional causality, cashed out by Kant in terms of representations of rules serving as reasons, the works of art would be mere products of nature. At the same time, their freedom from particular, conceptually determinable purposes makes them suitable for conceptually indeterminable judgments of taste.⁷

In accordance with his analysis of a judgment of beauty that manifests exemplary necessity, Kant describes the rules involved in great products of art as exemplary. Just like one cannot make a judgment of beauty by relying on rule-formulations, one cannot learn how to write inspired poetry by imitating others or by consulting a manual. Nevertheless, like the judgment of beauty that is offered as an example of a rule, so too the rule of art is meant to serve "as a standard or rule for judging" (CPJ 5:308). The rule of art "cannot be couched in a formula to serve as a precept [...] rather, the rule must be abstracted from the deed", from the work of art that is (CPJ 5:309). The work "discloses a new rule, which could not have been deduced from any antecedent principles or examples" (CPJ 5:317). One way to understand this is to take the rule of art to be constitutive for the possibility of the work to be a work of art, but not responsible to a conceptual standard external to itself. "The concept of beautiful art", Kant writes, "does not allow the judgment concerning the beauty of its product to be derived from any sort of rule that has a **concept** for its determining ground" (CPJ 5:307). Yet, while works of art do not convey a determinate conceptual thought, they still must meet the "requirements of the understanding for coherence and communicability" (Allison 2001, 284–285). They meet them precisely because they manifest features that allow for the kind of interplay between understanding and imagination felt as pleasure that we claim others ought to feel too.

In addition to the “rule of art”, Kant also mentions the rules of art in plural, speaking of “academic correctness” and “training” necessary for the elaboration of the raw material provided by the genius. In this context, it is safe to assume that by the rules of art Kant means the conventions of a given field of art, presumably open to conceptualization as well.⁸ He writes, “There is no beautiful art in which something mechanical, which can be grasped and followed according to rule, and thus something academically correct, does not constitute the essential condition for art. For something in it must be thought of as an end, otherwise one cannot ascribe its product to any art at all; it would be a mere product of chance” (CPJ 5:310). So even Kant acknowledges the artworks rely on a tradition of rules, even if they should do that “without the academic form showing through” (CPJ 5:307).

To sum up, in cognitive judgments the imagination is constrained by the concepts of the understanding, but in artistic production “the imagination is free to provide, beyond the concord with the concept, unsought extensive material for the understanding” (CPJ 5:314, 5:317). Moreover, as Kant has shown, the step outside the bounds of conceptual thinking does not entail that artworks or the corresponding judgments of beauty are “original nonsense” or hopelessly subjective impressions with no lawfulness involved (CPJ 5:308). Given that the power of judgment brings its *a priori* principle of formal purposiveness into the judgment, the claim to necessity made by the judgment of beauty is as justified as the conceptual necessities we encounter in the realm of cognition. Similarly, works of art may be seen as manifesting the *form* of purposiveness which grounds their communicability.

VI. WITTGENSTEIN ON THE TWO POLES OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

At this point one may justifiably think that while Kant has given us good reasons to treat judgments of beauty as normative and hence evoking the need for a standard for that normativity, the philosophical price for adopting his view is simply too high. After all, Kant’s argument relies

heavily on his fixed architecture of transcendental faculties. However, we find a version of the argument in Wittgenstein's later remarks on aesthetics that incorporate some of Kant's central concerns but do so without relying on faculty talk. It is to Wittgenstein's formulation of the normativist insight in aesthetics that I will now turn.

In accordance with Kant's overall project to determine the limits of different types of judgments marked by their respective sets of rules, Wittgenstein writes in the *Tractatus* that "only connexions that are *subject to law* are *thinkable*" (TLP 6.361). For the early Wittgenstein, the relevant laws are grounded in the logical form of language and reality, known to the subject *a priori* as the form of her thought (TLP 2.17, 3.03, 5.473–5.4733).⁹ While the later Wittgenstein rejects the Tractarian view of the universal and immutable logical form, he nevertheless continues to treat rules of grammar as the shared foundation for communication (TLP 2.022, 2.026; PI §§ 142, 240). Without the contextual interconnections provided by the rules, constitutive of our language games, an expression "may be anything or nothing" at all (PI §§ 6, 371).

Moreover, the understanding of language requires more than mere conformity to a mechanism of rules; it requires the speaker's familiarity with the rules of grammar and her ability to justify her linguistic utterances by appeal to those rules (PI §§ 184–217, 531). If this were not the case, then it would make no sense to talk about understanding, which for Wittgenstein is a normative notion standing in need of a criterion to distinguish it from misunderstanding. However, like Kant, Wittgenstein notes that justifications given by explicit rule-formulations lead to an infinite regress (PI § 201; CPR A133).¹⁰ Hence, the account of linguistic communication given exclusively by means of rule-formulations has its limits. Wittgenstein writes: "Once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do.'" (PI § 217).

Like Kant, Wittgenstein extends his emphasis on rules to his treatment of aesthetics. If I did not know the rules of harmony and counterpoint, he states, I would not understand music, but

would be like a dog wagging its tale when hearing music (LC I:17). My response to music would be “pathological” in the Kantian sense of being merely empirically conditioned (CPJ 5: 209; M 9:34). In 1933, Wittgenstein makes the point by reference to the Kantian distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful.¹¹ He begins by rejecting the account of beauty as a property of objects, i.e., an essence shared by all things we call beautiful, and goes on to distinguish between two kinds of judgments as follows:

“[1] you are calling a smell beautiful; & can say no more than ‘I like the smell of lilac’, ‘I don’t care particularly about it’

[2] you are talking about arrangement of flowers in a bed: here you can say much more” (M 9:13).

According to Wittgenstein the term “beautiful” is used in quite different senses in the two examples. He argues that if the judgment [1] only means that the smell causes a pleasant sensation, then we are dealing with a question of experience: either the smell causes the pleasant sensation or it does not. However, according to Wittgenstein, judgment [2] indicates more, namely, that “you enjoy the shape, in the sense in which the shape enters into the enjoyment” (M 9:14). According to Wittgenstein, the nature of enjoyment is different in the two cases. In the case of a good smell, the enjoyment is merely “angenehm” (agreeable), induced causally and a matter of mere experience. But in the case of appreciating the arrangement of flowers in a bed, the judgment itself is “Lustbetont”. The pleasure is not merely accompanying the sensation, but rather characterizes or accentuates the judgment of beauty. In this respect, beauty resembles desires, motives, and fears that have a grammatical rather than a causal relation to their object. (M 9:14; LC II:18.)

Wittgenstein says: “The question in Aesthetics is not: Do you like it? But, if you do, why do you? [...] If we ever come to: I like this; I don’t, there is an end of Aesthetics; & then comes psychology”

(M 9:26). The point is that a mere subjective feeling of pleasure in the face of a sensible representation does not yet count as a proper judgment of beauty.

Wittgenstein's own examples of agreeableness resonate with those of Kant. He uses the term in relation to tastes of food and smells (M 9: 6; 9:13–9:26; LC II: 3). Most importantly, in accordance with Kant, Wittgenstein denies that such feelings of agreeableness are essential for proper aesthetic judgments. He says: "So to say *King Lear* is 'agreeable' is like saying a chair has a smell. *King Lear* is very a complex experience, & this is about the least important thing you could say about it" (M 9:16). Interestingly, Wittgenstein illustrates the difference between agreeableness and beauty by another example, which directly echoes Kant's formalism and mistrust of colours as potentially beautiful things. Wittgenstein says: "If I say of a flower 'Isn't this a marvellous colour?' I mean something quite different from if I shew a painted pattern, where it may mean 'is good for a wall-paper'" (M 9:16). Now, for Kant, wall-paper exemplified a free beauty, perfectly suited for a judgment of beauty free from concepts as well as from such sensuous contents that would influence us in a pathological, merely causal manner. Kant's point was that the object of free contemplation that could result in a judgment of beauty should be form that is independent of "charms and emotions". The same autonomy of beauty is clearly at stake for Wittgenstein as well, who says, evoking yet again the example of wall-paper:

"... writing a good accompaniment; designing a good door; choosing a suitable wall-paper. Suppose you find a bass too heavy – that it moves too much; you aren't saying: If it moves less, it will be more agreeable to me. That it should be quieter is an end in itself, not a means to end." (M 9:20.)

While the agreeable pertains to smells and tastes and may be captured by empirical generalizations, for Wittgenstein, aesthetic investigation is not psychological or corroborated by empirical evidence (M 9:18–41; LC II: 1–3, 34–38, III:7–8). Rather, just like Kant, who writes about someone confusing the agreeable with the beautiful that "he must not call it **beautiful** if it

pleases merely him”, so too Wittgenstein assumes that the language of beauty is normative. In 1933, Wittgenstein expresses the point as follows: “When I say ‘This bass moves too much’ I don’t merely mean ‘It gives me such & such an impression’, because If I did I should have to be content with the answer ‘It doesn’t give me that impression” (M 9:28). But we are not content with that. As Wittgenstein later points out, in aesthetics we make claims as in a court of law, claims that call for reasons even when we have been deprived of the conceptual resources to which appeal in justifying the judgment (LC III:11–12; M 9:32).

As in the case of language, we hold the speaker accountable for her aesthetic judgments and require that he give us *reasons* for his judgments (LC III:12). Indeed, Wittgenstein follows Kant in assuming that there is an important contrast between causes and reasons, corresponding to the contrast between empirical explanations and intentional or “grammatical” explanations (TLP 4.111; PI §§ 90, 109; cf. CPJ 5:386-8).¹² Hence, Wittgenstein’s repeated remarks on the centrality of notions such as “correct”, “right”, and “necessary” in aesthetics (LC I:8; M 9:18–9:19; CV, 65). However, in accordance with Kant’s emphasis on the nonconceptuality of judgments of beauty, Wittgenstein suggests that aesthetic reasons are not typically given by explicit rule-formulations. In fact, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, he brings up the understanding of music and poetry as examples that do not allow for a conceptual reformulation (PI § 531). Yet, as cases of understanding, they require some criteria of correctness to distinguish them from mere empirically induced reactions. But if the rules that serve to distinguish the realm of art from the realm of the agreeable are not primarily conceptual rule-formulations, then whence do my aesthetic judgments acquire their normative force? In my reading, this very question underlies Wittgenstein’s focus on reason-giving in aesthetics (see M 9:30–9:50).

To be sure, in describing aesthetic systems, like music, poetry, tailoring, or architecture, Wittgenstein evokes such “academic” rules as the rules of harmony and counterpoint, poetic meters, and the rules of tailoring that may be conceptually formulated. These lay down the background

against which we call certain aesthetic choices “correct”, “right”, “wrong”, and “necessary”. But to explain why a certain note, say, is necessary in a given musical context is not as straightforward as merely appealing to Theory of Harmony. Wittgenstein says:

“In the case of the word ‘correct’ you have a variety of related cases. The first is when you learn the rules. The cutter learns how long a coat is to be, how wide the sleeve must be, etc. He learns the rules – he is drilled – as in music you are drilled in harmony and counterpoint. Suppose I went in for tailoring and I first learnt all the rules, I might have, on the whole, two sorts of attitude: (1) Lewy says: This is too short.” I say: “No. It is right. It is according to the rules.” (2) I develop a feeling for the rules. I interpret the rules. I might say: “No. It isn’t right. It isn’t according to the rules.” Here I would be making an aesthetic judgment about the thing which is according to the rules in sense (1). On the other hand, if I hadn’t learnt the rules, I wouldn’t be able to make the aesthetic judgment. In learning the rules you get more and more refined judgment. Learning the rules actually changes your judgment.” (LC I:15.)

Here, we find Wittgenstein discussing the basis of the normativity of aesthetic judgment in a way that does justice both to the idea of rules as the condition of understanding and to the idea that my relation to the rules is also a matter of developing *feeling*, something that lies at the core of aesthetic judgment (cf. TLP 6.45; PI § 535). Moreover, it is this moment of relying on one’s feeling rather than a rule-formulation that marks the boundary of conceptual justifications in aesthetics.

In the first case of aesthetic correctness, discussed by Wittgenstein, I have mastered the rules as an apprentice and know, say, how the bass line typically works in a piece of music. And acquiring such mastery involves imitation and reliance on rule-formulations. In the second case, however, I may acknowledge that while there is no clear mistake, the performance still does not satisfy me: “Does this harmonize? No. The bass is not quite loud enough. Here I want something different” (LC I:19). This second judgment rests on a subjective response, which Wittgenstein calls

an “aesthetic reaction”, to the use to which the musical rules have been put (LC II:10). Such responses to “aesthetic puzzlements” as Wittgenstein calls them, cannot be justified by appeal to rule-formulations, nor learnt by mere imitation.

Yet, as the above discussion shows, aesthetic reactions as understood by Wittgenstein are not mere empirically conditioned reactions either. While the judgment relies on my *feeling* of dissatisfaction and expresses my *personal* preference, it is not disconnected from the system of music constituted by its musical rules. Rather, the discomfort or satisfaction I experience is, as Wittgenstein states, “directed” and the relevant explanation is “grammatical” (LC II:17–18). This is to say that the rule-governed system of music itself and my mastery of the rules provides the necessary background for my developing feeling. Accordingly, while I can conceptually explain why a melody written in a medieval mode comes to a close by saying that it reaches the tonic, hearing the melody as a complete whole also requires that I have learnt to “*feel* the ending of a church mode as an ending” (PI § 535, see M 9:41). This change of perspective corresponds to Kant’s shift from the determining use of the power of judgment to its reflective use where, instead of representing the purposiveness of the melody objectively by reference to the concept of the tonic, I represent it on a merely subjective ground (cf. CPJ 5:192).¹³

So we find the two poles of a judgment of beauty – the freedom from conceptual rules and the quest for a rule to ground the possibility of communication – also in Wittgenstein’s treatment of aesthetics. In the *Brown Book*, Wittgenstein notes, giving voice to the pleasurable frustrated yearning for a rule:

The same strange illusion which we are under when we seem to seek something which a face expresses whereas, in reality, we are giving ourselves up to the features before us – that same illusion possesses us even more strongly if repeating a tune to ourselves and letting it make its full impression on us, we say “This tune says *something*”, and it is as though I had to find *what* it says. And yet I know that it doesn’t say anything such that I might express in words or

pictures what it says. And if, recognizing this, I resign myself to saying ‘It just expresses a musical thought’, this would mean no more than saying “It expresses itself”. (BB, 166).

Put in Kantian terms, Wittgenstein’s phrase “it is as though I had to find out what it says” is the voice of the understanding, longing for a conceptual explanation of the content of the theme. The “yet I know that I cannot find a verbal or pictorial expression for what it says” is the insistence of the imagination on the irreducibility of the sensible manifold of the musical tune to something else. And yet this as-if-quality of seeming to say something is of crucial importance for the judgment of beauty. My experience of the tune *as if* communicating something demands agreement from others even when I cannot explain what it is that it communicates.

Wittgenstein says: “People sometimes say that we choose course which gives us least pain or most pleasure: but they don’t really here mean that it is a question of experience: they mean that it must be so, i.e. that it is a tautology, & yet that it has some meaning” (M 9:18; see also NB 40). Wittgenstein’s use of the term tautology is particularly interesting in this context. According to his early work *Tractatus*, tautologies are propositions that lack sense, given that they do not depict empirical states of affairs. Yet, tautologies are not nonsensical either. This is because while the representational relations between a tautology and reality “cancel one another”, tautologies still have the *form* of sense – a prerequisite for sense proper. Moreover, by contrast to ordinary sentences that are always capable of being true and capable of being false, tautologies are necessarily true. (TLP 4.46–4.4661.)

What for Kant grounds the normative force of a judgment of beauty is the *a priori* principle of the power of judgment. Kant seeks to establish the status of the power of judgment as a faculty that belongs to the group of higher cognitive faculties, thereby showing that reflecting judgments, even when they are nonconceptual, can make a rightful claim to exemplary necessity. Now, for the later Wittgenstein, the rules of language and art are neither fixed nor anchored in an architecture of transcendental faculties. Nor can they be justified by reference to something beyond

the linguistic or aesthetics system itself (PI §§ 198–199, 208–210, 497). Even when we treat a rule as “unshakeably certain” and as conditioning the possibility of communication, it derives its status as a certainty from the use to which it is put in our language (RFM III:39). In this respect, Wittgenstein’s version of the argument for the normative character of aesthetics is less demanding than Kant’s, as it locates the rules in the culturally and historically variable practices themselves (LC I:16, 22, 26–31).

Nevertheless, as I have argued, Wittgenstein joins Kant in claiming that judgments of beauty differ from judgment of the agreeable and that because of this aesthetic investigation cannot be empirical. Moreover, given that aesthetic judgment relies not only on one’s familiarity with the rules constitutive of the artistic practices but also on one’s feeling, it cannot be exhaustively captured by conceptual rule-formulations. Instead, when I claim that the bass moves too much, I am offering my own judgment as a normative statement. There is no conceptual explanation of the content of art available either. As in the case of a musical tune, where I ultimately “resign myself to saying” that it expresses itself, I simply treat the works of art as meaningful (BB, 166). In other words, I treat them as instances of rules that have been put to use without a further explanation of what that use is supposed to be.

While Wittgenstein does not appeal to transcendental faculties in explaining the grounds for the normative force of aesthetic judgment, his way of characterizing reason-giving in aesthetics evokes a version of Kant’s idea of formal purposiveness. However, in Wittgenstein’s account, the purposiveness resides in the aesthetic systems themselves. Given that aesthetic explanations cannot appeal to a standard outside the aesthetic system itself, the kinds of reasons given in aesthetics take the form of further descriptions and comparisons. Aesthetic descriptions do not explain the phenomenon by appeal to a further realm, like psychology, but aim at showing how the pieces of an aesthetic puzzle may “click into place”:

One asks such a question as “What does this remind me of?” or one says of a piece of music: “This is like some sentence, but what sentence is it like?” Various things are suggested; one thing, as you say, clicks (LC III:1).

In the case of aesthetic discomfort about a musical performance, such clicking may be accomplished, for example, by making the bass line stronger and thereby rendering the musical performance more balanced (LC I:19). Or in the case of architecture, by making the door higher so that it fits with its surroundings (LC II:11). The kind of clicking in question – and indeed the very possibility of there being an aesthetic puzzle in the first place – relies on there being an aesthetic system that constituted by its own autonomous rules that are not responsible to anything over and above themselves (M 7:2; PI § 497). Still, the rule-governed system as a whole allows for the kind of a perspective that shows a certain aesthetic choice as purposive in its context, experienced as the “clicking”. It allows us to see unity in a manifold, to put the point in Kantian terms.

But again, given that my judgment rests on my own feeling arising as a response to the formal purposiveness of the aesthetic system, I cannot force another to adopt it. For you may not be satisfied by the reasons I offer for my judgment (M 9:30–9:31, 9:39). You may not *see* the connections that I see within the system or *feel* the ending of a church mode as an ending. Hence, even when I have explained my aesthetic judgment by further descriptions and by pointing to new connections within the aesthetic system, in the end you must make the judgment for yourself. Wittgenstein says: “A solution must speak for itself. If when I’ve made you see what I see, it doesn’t appeal to you, there is an end” (M 9:31; see CV, 79).

Finally, like Kant, Wittgenstein connects the above account of aesthetic judgment to the point at which one cannot produce a new rule-formulation to justify one’s application of the grammatical rule. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, he distinguishes between two ways of understanding of sentence, where the first is manifest in the speaker’s ability to provide another sentence which says the same, but the second is more like the understanding of a musical theme

which cannot be replaced by any other (PI § 531). In 1933, Wittgenstein states explicitly that we may approach grammar either “discursively”, i.e. as a calculus that may be taught to another, or “intuitively”, taking in the grammatical system “as a whole” (M 8:58). The latter approach, while clearly still connected to the rule-governed structure of the grammatical system, does not allow for a conceptual analysis, but focuses instead on achieving “a surveyable representation” of the grammatical system that “produces precisely that kind of understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’” (PI § 122). Seeing such a synoptic overview, Wittgenstein claims, gives rise to “immediate pleasure” that satisfies our “aesthetic craving” in a way in which a conceptual explanation of an empirical hypothesis can never satisfy us (M 9:38–9:39).

VII. CONCLUSION

The overarching ethos of our own time is the appraisal of propositional knowledge as the primary form of encounter with the world. But if Kant and Wittgenstein are correct, knowledge itself involves a blind spot which resides in the moment of bringing together conceptual rules and their concrete applications. This blind spot cannot be filled by an appeal to conceptual resources. Hence, Kant argues that the principle of taste – the principle of formal purposiveness, revealed by his analysis of a judgment of beauty as a merely reflecting judgment – is “requisite for possible cognitions in general” (CPJ 5:290). Without the sense of purposiveness we *feel* in judgments of beauty that rely on our imagination as much as they rely on understanding, our discursive thought will remain paralyzed. But even when I judge purposiveness subjectively, based on my feeling rather than a determinate concept, I take my judgment to be universally communicable and accordingly in need of a common standard. This standard Kant locates in the power of judgment itself, whose *a priori* principle grounds the legitimacy of my judgment as an example of a rule.

We find the same pattern of thought in Wittgenstein's later work. The possibility of communication stands in need of shared criteria to distinguish understanding from misunderstanding. While Kant locates the criteria in our mental faculties, for Wittgenstein they reside in the rules of grammar. And what counts as a reason for me, ought to count as a reason for others as well. Yet, in my attempt to justify the application of a known rule to a particular case, "my reasons will soon give out" (PI § 211). Instead of rule-formulations, my understanding then relies on a feeling of appropriateness. This feeling, paradigmatically exemplified by judgments of beauty, is as indispensable for understanding as my familiarity with the conventional rules of a system, whether grammatical or aesthetic (PI §§ 531–532). To explain this subjective pole of my judgment I can only offer descriptions and comparisons that aim at showing how the pieces of the aesthetic puzzle click into place. In doing so I am not merely reporting my private impressions, for I claim that a certain aesthetic choice in its context is necessary. Yet, as I cannot explain the necessity I aesthetically experience by appealing to a standard external to the aesthetic system itself, I offer my own judgment as a rule. This rule derives its normative force from the surveyable representation of the system as a whole, i.e., from the system judged reflectively.

The common core of the arguments offered by Kant and Wittgenstein is that the acknowledgement of the freedom of judgments of beauty from conceptual constraints does not entail that the notion of a rule is dispensable from our account of aesthetics. What it does entail, however, is the need to understand the very notion a rule in a sense broader than one of a determining, conceptual rule. For if we give up the notion of a rule as essential for aesthetics and art, we run the risk of losing the normativity of the language of beauty. And more, if Kant and Wittgenstein are right, in losing that normativity we lose communicability. If there is no common standard – not even one as empty of empirical content as the principle of formal purposiveness – then our responses to works of art are no more than random likes or dislikes. And the works of art, they may be "anything or nothing at all" (PI § 6).¹⁴

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¹ On concepts as rules, see Ginsborg 1997, 48–59.

² In the *First Critique*, Kant defines imagination as “the faculty for representing an object even **without its presence** in intuition. Now since all of our intuition is sensible, the imagination, on account of the subjective condition under which alone it can give a corresponding intuition to the concepts of understanding, belongs to **sensibility**” (CPR B151). Intuitions, then, are “representations of imagination” (CPJ 5:314). Hence, when Kant in the *Third Critique* tries to establish a truce between imagination and understanding, he is talking about the very problem that haunted him already in the *First Critique*.

³ See Longuenesse 2006, 200.

⁴ On the role of reflecting judgment in cognition, see Bell 1987; Longuenesse 1998, 163–166; Allison 2001, 20–30, 144–159; Ginsborg 1997 & 2006; see also CPJ 1st Intro IV-VI & CPJ §§ 9, 21, 35.

⁵ For an alternative interpretation, see Guyer 1997, 300–307. Guyer argues that Kant should have appealed to the harmony of the faculties as the indeterminate concept involved in the solution to the antinomy and thus avoided what Guyer sees as an unpersuasive appeal to the supersensible.

⁶ Allison 2001, 246–260.

⁷ I am not suggesting that the freedom of a judgment of beauty is identical with moral freedom in the sense of autonomy Kant identifies with acting based on mere respect for the moral law. However, the common core of beauty and practical freedom in the weaker sense of self-determination resides in the agent's ability to give the rule to herself, which in turn presupposes purposiveness (hence Kant's mention of actions in CPJ § 10). The difference between the beautiful and the good arises from the disinterestedness of the judgment of beauty: practical judgments aim at conceptually formulable purposes even when that purpose is the realization of the highest good, as in the case of a pure moral judgment.

⁸ On the role of determining concepts in judgments of beauty, see Guyer 2006, 182–193. On the role of cultural conventions and the compatibility of determining and reflecting judgments of art, see Makkreel 2006, 233–244.

⁹ For Kantian interpretations of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, see, Stenius 1960; Glock 1992; Moore 2013; Appelqvist 2016.

¹⁰ This affinity between Wittgenstein and Kant has been noted by Cavell 1965/69; Bell 1987; Glock 1996, 326; Kukla 2006, 10; McDowell 2009, 110; cf. Savile 1993, 93–95. For an exposition of Wittgenstein's account of blind rule-following in relation to Kant and aesthetic judgment see Appelqvist 2017.

¹¹ On the Kantian features of Wittgenstein's lectures on aesthetics in 1933; see Appelqvist 2018.

¹² By “intentional” I do not refer to intentions understood as mental states, but to what Wittgenstein calls internal or grammatical relations between reasons and actions. Wittgenstein famously argues that such relations should be distinguished from causal relations (PI §§ 475–485). In this respect, his view may be read as echoing Kant’s contrast between the domains of nature and freedom.

¹³ Rudolf Makkreel has argued for a similar two-tier process of achieving aesthetic consensus in Kant’s case, see Makkreel 2006, 233–239.

¹⁴ Previous versions of this paper have been presented at the Aesthetics Work Group at the College of Charleston (February 23 2016), at the Annual Conference of the Nordic Society of Aesthetics (May 26–28 2016), and at the Philosophy Research Seminar at the University of Helsinki (October 13 2016). I want to thank the members of these events, especially Jonathan Neufeld and Lydia Goehr for their helpful feedback. I am also indebted to the Academy of Finland and the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies for financial support of my work.