Kantian Review (2026), **00**, 1–19
doi:10.1017/S136941542610154X

KANTIAN REVIEW
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Moral Sentiment as an Acquired Taste: Kant on Moral Cultivation through Analogical Reflection

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Abstract

This essay offers a systematic interpretation of Kant's account of moral cultivation in the Doctrine of Method of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. While the objective validity of the moral law is secured in the Analytic, the Doctrine of Method addresses the problem of how the law can become subjectively efficacious in agents who already possess freedom as the transcendental condition of their moral agency, and who must therefore not receive it from without, but acquire it as their own. Kant approaches this problem by introducing *Räsonieren*, a form of arguing that begins from perplexity and aims at cultivating moral sentiment (*Gesinnung*). I claim that this form of arguing is best understood on the model of reflective judgement as developed in the *Critique of Judgement*. Drawing on Kant's account of symbolic presentation in §59, I show that it functions as an ectypal form of analogical reflection already operative in ordinary practical reasoning.

Keywords: moral cultivation; reflective judgement; analogy; symbolism; respect; sublime

1. Introduction

It is a commonplace in the history of philosophy that philosophical cognition begins with wonder. Wonder, however, being more than passing astonishment, has a motivating character. It is philosophically fruitful only insofar as it unsettles our assumptions and prompts us to pursue a matter to its foundations. This motif of productive perplexity provides a fitting background for Kant's reflections on moral cultivation. For what is at stake in the Doctrine of Method of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is, first, how the moral law – already valid and already operative as the transcendental condition of agency – can come to be *recognised as such* by finite, sensible subjects, and, second, how a distinctive form of reflection, what I shall here call 'arguing' (*Räsonieren*), beginning from perplexity, can enable this process of recognition.

In the Doctrine of Method, Kant presents a way of fostering the subordination of the individual will to the moral law. The concern here is not to establish the law's objective validity, secured already in the Analytic, but to indicate how the moral law

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S136941542610154X Published online by Cambridge University Press

may gain affective influence over the maxims that guide action, that is, to cultivate moral sentiment[1] (*Gesinnung*) in the subject (5: 150).[2]

Despite the importance of this concern, the Doctrine of Method has received relatively little attention in Kant scholarship. Beck's classic commentary (Beck 1996) does not engage its function in any sustained way. Stefano Bacin has rightly objected to this dismissive tendency, showing that the Doctrine of Method is no mere appendix but completes the second *Critique* by addressing 'how the results of the inquiry are to be put into practice' (Bacin 2010: 119). He even claims that arguing (*Räsonieren*) plays a decisive role in this process. What Bacin's account leaves unexamined, however, is how this reflection can render freedom recognisable to a subject who must already be free for the relevant kind of reflection to be possible at all. Nor does he clarify the precise role of reflective judgement, especially the judgement of the sublime, within this process. Other recent scholarship, on the other hand, has placed greater emphasis on the role of aesthetic experience – specially the sublime – in disclosing human freedom. Angelica Nuzzo underscores the formative function of reflective judgement in mediating between sensibility and reason (Nuzzo 2005); Robert Clewis interprets the sublime as revealing the supersensible vocation of the subject (Clewis 2009); and Joshua Rayman stresses its role in cultivating the proper attunement to the moral law (Rayman 2012). Yet these accounts leave insufficiently examined how the form of reflective judgement elaborated in the third *Critique* provides the epistemic infrastructure for the method of *Räsonieren* outlined in the second and how this infrastructure itself already presupposes, rather than produces, the freedom it renders recognisable. The present essay develops such an account.

The central claim is that the method of arguing Kant outlines in the Doctrine of Method functions as an ectypal form of reflective judgement and that it draws upon the analogical structure of symbolic presentation to cultivate moral sentiment. The archetypical form of this arguing, as articulated in the *Critique of Judgement*, is reflection on the sublime, where the subject is confronted with something that overwhelms the empirical understanding and is brought to recognise her own rational vocation in the very act of failing to grasp the object empirically. Arguing over moral exemplars, as articulated in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, exhibits a homologous structure: the subject is confronted with a course of action that resists direct determination by inclination or self-interest. Reflecting on this renunciation of inclination, the subject feels a certain 'pain' (CPrR, 5: 160). Only the invocation of freedom as the subjective standard of reflection renders the action intelligible, brings release, and, as Kant puts it, 'raises [*erhebt*] my worth' (5: 162). In both cases, the structure is one of initial perplexity giving way to a reflective resolution in which freedom emerges as the condition of intelligibility. This is why arguing as a kind of reflection makes the subject become aware of her sublime worth and of her freedom as the condition of this experience, enhancing her will to act accordingly. And this is why reading the Doctrine of Method through the third *Critique* is systematically illuminating.

This mode of reflection does not, however, generate moral agency from sensibility, as if aesthetic reflection were a bridge leading the subject from the merely sensible to the moral. Nor does it simply activate a latent capacity, as if aesthetic experience were the trigger that sets into actuality a freedom which was already present but not yet operative. Since freedom is already operative as the condition of the possibility of

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aesthetic experience itself, arguing renders this very freedom reflectively accessible to the subject as the transcendental condition of moral agency. The subject can experience and understand the sublime only because she is already free. Aesthetic reflection, in the end, does make freedom operative, but only at a second level as it motivates the subject to avail herself, in action, of the very freedom that was already operative as the condition of the experience through which she came to recognise it. What she acquires is therefore not freedom itself, but the practical disposition to act from a freedom she already possessed (what I will refer to later as a claim regarding a special sort of 'acquisition').[3]

Moral cultivation, therefore, does not produce freedom (*ratio essendi*); it brings it to awareness (*ratio cognoscendi*). Kant's account of cultivation thus illustrates the productive role of wonder and perplexity in making us *receptive* to our own freedom. Moral sentiment, understood as a disposition to judge empirical phenomena in the light of practical reason, is an *acquired taste*.

In what follows, as a preliminary step, I draw on the resources of the *Critique of Judgement* to shed light on Kant's account in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, arguing that the systematic role of reflective judgement makes the methodological concerns of the Doctrine of Method more intelligible (section 2). I then outline the function of reflective judgement as a symbolic and analogical mode of presentation (sections 2–3). In sections 4 and 5, I demonstrate how the Doctrine of Method builds upon this infrastructure to foster moral cultivation, showing that the feeling of respect for the moral law has an aesthetic analogue in the feeling of the sublime, and that through analogical reflection on examples of human conduct, the subject can come to an awareness of her own freedom. Finally, in section 6, I argue that while of course moral cultivation is not the *ratio essendi* of freedom, it is its *ratio cognoscendi*.

2. The systematic connection between the second and the third *Critique*

In §59 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Kant introduces the procedure of symbolising ideas of reason through reflective judgement. I will argue that this procedure provides the conceptual infrastructure that Kant presupposes in the Doctrine of Method of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, even though it is not yet systematically developed there. The interpretative move is systematic rather than historical. I aim to show that the structural connections between the two works are necessary for making the method of arguing (*Räsonieren*) outlined in the Doctrine of Method fully intelligible. Before turning to the second *Critique*'s Doctrine of Method, it is therefore appropriate to examine the relevant resources of the *Critique of Judgement*.

A central systematic presupposition of Kant's account is that feeling can participate in a reflective form of rational insight. Kant identifies this in his correspondence with Reinhold, where he speaks of 'a new kind of principles a priori' belonging to 'the feeling of pleasure and displeasure' (Corr, 10: 514). This constitutes a conceptual innovation. Feeling, long treated as epistemically opaque, subjective, and simply a matter of 'empirical psychology' (CJ, 5: 266), is now seen to participate in a form of cognition that is not merely empirical. As a result, aesthetics acquires a new dimension of systematic significance.[4]

The systematic significance of this innovation becomes clear when contrasted with the more restricted conception of aesthetics in the first *Critique*. There (B35),

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Kant explicitly criticises the German use of the term 'aesthetic' – referring in particular to Baumgarten – as a 'critique of taste', calling this a fundamental mistake as the laws governing judgements of taste are merely empirical and cannot ground a genuine science. On this earlier view, aesthetics could function as a transcendental science only insofar as it concerned the pure forms of intuition. What changes in the third *Critique* is that Kant extends aesthetics to cover the a priori connection between certain sensible presentations and the feelings of pleasure and displeasure. This allows for the investigation of judgements of the beautiful and the sublime as disclosing lawful affective responses common to all rational beings. Such an extension is not merely a broadening of scope; it is what makes possible the systematic role that aesthetic judgement plays in moral cultivation.

Scholars have noted that Kant's account of symbolisation in the third *Critique* is systematically connected to the concerns of the second (Tonelli 1954; Nuzzo 2005: 74). In the third *Critique*, Kant recognises that, when confronted with certain appearances, we are capable of forming experiences that exceed empirical classification. There, Kant characterises these experiences further. They allow us, on the one hand, to conceive of nature as purposive (the experience of beauty) and, on the other, to conceive of ourselves as purposive in relation to nature (the experience of the sublime) (CJ, 5: 246; Ostaric 2023: 153).

This connection is significant when viewed against the background of Kant's moral philosophy. Respect (*Achtung*) is introduced in the second *Critique* not as psychological in origin but as the affective response to the moral law's necessitation of the will. This 'practical necessitation' (CPrR, 5: 80) is what Kant refers to as the *Factum* of reason: not a psychological impulse or empirical stimulus, but the immediate awareness of the moral law's authority within practical consciousness. Already in Reflection 5448 (1776–78), Kant notes that if respect were a stimulus or empirical affection, it could not serve as the motive for a free action. Later, in the second *Critique*, he writes: '[I]n order to avoid misinterpretation in regarding this law as *given*, it must be noted carefully that it is not an empirical fact but the sole fact of pure reason, which, by it, announces itself as originally lawgiving (*sic volo, sic jubeo*)' (5: 31). Respect, therefore, must be conceived as the subjective correlate of a law that addresses the will directly. It is a 'necessitation' that does not originate in sensibility. The fact of being necessitated by the moral law thus constitutes 'the consciousness of a *free* submission of the will to the law, yet as combined with an unavoidable constraint put on all inclinations though only by one's own reason [and this consciousness] is respect for the law' (5: 34).

From this account of the *Factum*, Kant deduces the conditions of its possibility, namely the autonomy of reason and the objective validity of the concept of freedom. As Ostaric shows, 'Kant does not offer a theoretical proof (*Beweis*) of the normative primacy of the moral law and, hence, sees no place for a deduction of its validity. Instead, his efforts are aimed at 'showing' (*dartun*) (KpV, 5: 3, 42) that the moral law is binding for us' (Ostaric 2023: 22). However, even this weaker kind of grounding presupposes a certain kind of experience, namely the feeling of moral obligation (*Nötigung*). We must ask how one comes to feel this obligation. In other words: let us grant Kant, for the sake of argument, that his grounding of freedom in the *Factum* of

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reason is valid, and that becoming conscious of one's own freedom in the practical sense – being able to determine the will in accordance with the moral law – depends on a certain kind of experience. How is it that I, as a sensible being, first experience myself as capable of listening to the 'voice' (CPrR, 5: 79) of reason? How is it that I feel myself as obligated by reason in the first place?

I shall argue that, for Kant, this has to do with what he calls 'cultivation' as a form of affective responsiveness to the call of reason, to the obligation to do otherwise, to do better. In the final part of the second *Critique*, Kant states that the objectively valid moral law must gain access to the mind in order to become subjectively binding. It requires cultivation to enable me to conceive of myself as free in the sense of being bound to reason above all other inclinations.

Here the *Critique of Judgement* proves enlightening. In the Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement, Kant shows how sensibly overwhelming experiences – such as the vastness of the starry heavens or the opacity of morally inscrutable actions – can elicit a reflective response in which reason asserts itself beyond the limits of sensibility. While this shift does not necessarily yield theoretical knowledge, it awakens an awareness of one's autonomy by symbolically presenting the supersensible through aesthetic feeling. As Paul Guyer puts it, 'the sublime is ultimately a satisfying experience which makes clear the vocation of reason', and more broadly, it serves to 'symbolize the secure dominance of reason in human life' (Guyer 1996: 191). Already in the second *Critique*, Kant recognises that 'the genuine moral incentive of pure practical reason ... is nothing other than the pure moral law itself insofar as it lets us [feel (*spüren*)] the *sublimity* of our own supersensible existence and subjectively effects respect for their higher vocation in human beings, who are at the same time conscious of their sensible existence and of the dependence, connected with it, on their pathologically affected nature' (CPrR, 5: 88, emphasis RP).

Thus, even in the second *Critique*, Kant recognises that it is the feeling of the sublime – even if not identical and only analogous to moral respect – that prompts the subject to relate to itself as a rational being. This affective shift, this moment of reflective self-revelation, marks the point at which the idea of freedom becomes experientially accessible and therefore effective. In this way, the third *Critique* provides the systematic framework that the second *Critique* presupposes but does not elaborate. It shows how sensibility, far from being a barrier to morality, can serve as its point of entry. What the Doctrine of Method sketches as a pedagogical possibility, the *Critique of Judgement* secures as a principle of aesthetic-reflective cognition. This now prepares us to turn directly to §59 and examine the symbolic mechanism through which ideas of reason acquire affective resonance in the subject.

3. Concepts of reason need rendering by way of analogy

The question raised at the end of the previous section – how cultivation can render a subject receptive to a freedom she already possesses – requires us to examine the cognitive structure through which ideas of reason can acquire sensible resonance at all. This is precisely what Kant addresses in §59 of the *Critique of Judgement*,

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through his account of symbolic presentation. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant observes that

> We call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent, or fields smiling and joyful; even colors are called innocent, modest or tender, because they arouse sensations that contain something analogical to the consciousness of a mental state produced by moral judgments. (CJ, 5: 354)

When we speak of 'trees as majestic' or 'colours as innocent', we are engaging in an analogical use of language, that is, we describe something as if it behaved like something entirely different. Analogy refers to a mode of expression in which a relation or quality from one domain (often moral or rational) is projected onto another (typically sensible or natural). For example, in the metaphor of the majestic tree, the lone tree on the plain stands as a king sits upon his throne; or we relate a softly pink sunrise to the innocence of a moral disposition. These metaphors enhance, so to speak, the infrastructure of analogy (A:B :: C:D), whether or not it is made explicit.[5] And for Kant, such analogical speech shows that '[t]aste as it were makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest without too violent a leap' (CJ, 5: 354).

This indicates that it is taste, or more precisely judgement by way of analogical reflection, that allows a sensible subject to become orientated towards ideas of reason. This orientation involves a movement within reflective judgement that reaches towards ideas of reason without violating the epistemic boundaries of discursive rationality and, therefore, does not amount to 'too violent a leap'.

To demonstrate that such a leap has occurred is to show that the person in question lays false claim to validity. A violent leap occurs when the power of judgement seeks to determine a tree as majestic (in a univocal sense). When Kant, by contrast, speaks of the analogical use of language, which he terms symbolic, no such determination takes place. In symbolisation, concepts are not used univocally but in an analogous manner. Thus, when we call a tree majestic, we are not actually determining the tree itself; rather, we reflect the idea of majesty through the tree, treating it as a symbol. We speak of the tree as if it were a king seated upon a throne.

To speak in more Kantian terms, symbolic concept-use may in one regard be seen as a kind of amphiboly (B316), insofar as an idea of reason is applied to a given phenomenon even though, as a product of the faculty of reason, it cannot be directly applied to sensibility. And yet we do apply such a concept – for example, the majesty of a tree – to an object of the senses. This, however, does not amount to amphiboly *stricto sensu*, that is, it does not entail a confusion between the regulative and the transcendent use of a concept (Mácha 2009: 75). Such confusion arises only in the absence of proper reflection ('Überlegung (reflexio)'; B316), when one fails to recognise that the concept of the majestic is not, strictly speaking, applicable in empirical judgement. Once this has been grasped and the judgement is nevertheless made, the amphiboly is not only harmless but indeed productive, since it represents a legitimate and meaningful extension of our cognitive capacities by way of analogy, that is, through symbolisation.

According to Kant, concepts of reason can be represented through such symbolisation (CJ, 5: 351). Nothing in the sensible world *is* majestic; the sensible world is indifferent to the rational, just as purposive rationality is valid independently of its

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direct recognition. The theoretical and practical use of reason are indifferent to each other, each asserting its own claims to validity without constraining the other. According to Kant, this gulf cannot be bridged through the theoretical use of reason (5: 176), that is, by way of determinative judgement. Thus, to show that concepts of reason have some reality for us as sensible beings, what is required is a procedure for presenting them. Such a procedure must enable the subject to become reflectively orientated towards practical reason without dissolving the essential heterogeneity of the sensible and the rational, and therefore without making a violent leap, as Kant puts it.

In §59 of the *Critique of Judgement,* Kant lays out this procedure of indirect presentation.[6] He begins by noting that both empirical and pure concepts of the understanding can be presented directly. In the theoretical use of reason, the reality of an empirical concept is verified by the immediate subsumption of something under that concept. If we ask what a given concept means – say 'table' – we need only give an example (CJ, 5: 351). But we can never find anything adequate in intuition for ideas of reason. Direct presentation of these concepts is therefore impossible. Thus, if we nonetheless wish to render sensible a concept from the sphere of the purposive use of reason, an alternative mode of presentation is required. Kant writes:

> [This representation is] symbolic, where to a concept which only reason can think, and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate, an intuition is attributed with which the power of judgment proceeds in a way merely analogous to that which it observes in schematization, i.e., it is merely the rule of this procedure, not of the intuition itself, and thus merely the form of the reflection, not the content, which corresponds to the concept. (CJ, 5: 354)

Hence, if we wish to confer real meaning on these concepts, we must, Kant says, take a peculiar detour via symbolic representation, which operates by way of analogy.

How Kant conceives of this indirect presentation becomes clear when viewed against a marginal reflection on Meier's *Vernunftlehre*, where Kant writes that a symbol is a 'sign of a sign' (*Zeichen vom Zeichen*).[7] An ordinary sign points away from itself towards an object in the world. When I use a photograph to show someone a particular tree, the photograph functions as a direct sign, directing attention away from itself to its referent. A symbol points to itself as a sign, and through this self-reference draws attention to something that cannot appear in intuition at all. The same photograph, viewed years later, may no longer refer to the tree itself but evoke a shared memory or gesture towards something that exceeds what is sensibly given. In doing so, it functions as a symbol, namely as a sign that refers to itself in order to indicate something beyond the sensible.

The difference from schematism becomes visible here. Where schematism determines an intuition through a concept by means of a schema, symbolic presentation reflects an intuition in its relation to a concept of reason. The intuition serves as a sensible stand-in for something it cannot itself be, and the analogy it sets up becomes the object of reflection, which Kant describes as concerning 'language and not the object itself' (Pr, 4: 357). The symbol is therefore a substitute. Something sensible stands in for a non-sensible object that cannot be given in intuition, as if it were something it cannot be, given the irreducible difference between ideas and empirical objects. The substitution does not determine its object, since that would

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produce an amphiboly in the strict sense. It functions instead as a sensible placeholder for an unknown object, some 'X', on which meaning is conferred by way of analogy. How this structure of analogical reflection extends to any sensible appearance whatsoever, and why it is indispensable for moral cultivation, is the subject of the following section.

4. Kant's method of indirect presentation by analogy applies to any sensible appearance

The preceding analysis has shown that symbolic presentation operates by reflecting on an intuition against the background of a concept that resists direct presentation and allows us to see why Kant's method of indirect presentation by analogy is not confined to the symbolisation of the morally good through beautiful phenomena but extends to any sensible appearance whatsoever. Thus, we see, on the one hand, what an idea can mean for us *in concreto*, and on the other hand, how the phenomenal nexus appears in the light of an idea.

Whereas the schematising use of concepts directly determines intuition, the symbolic use applies concepts to an intuition as a symbol. Of course, a raised finger remains just a raised finger, but it can be reflected upon as a sign, as something sensible standing for something else, as if it were something else. It would make no sense to determine the finger as a flash of insight, but it is perfectly sensible to represent what a flash of insight is by reflecting on the raised finger as symbol. However, no one, for lack of judgement, confuses the finger itself with a flash of insight. This means that when we make a reflective judgement, we are not committing an amphiboly but rather, we are demonstrating judgement (*Urteilskraft*). Thus, alongside the faculties by which we form direct judgements – either by theoretically determining objects through understanding or by practically determining the will through reason – we must posit a third faculty, an 'intermediary' (CJ, 5: 177), which we can invoke precisely through the kind of judgement that proceeds by way of analogy.

Symbolisation is, as Kant puts it, an indirect presentation 'by means of an analogy' (CJ, 5: 352). As the following passage makes clear, its scope extends far beyond the symbolisation of the morally good through beautiful phenomena:

> Our language is full of such indirect presentations, in accordance with an analogy, where the expression does not contain the actual schema for the concept but only a symbol for reflection. Examples are the words **ground** (support, basis), **depend** (be held from above), from which **flow** (instead of follow), **substance** (as Locke expresses it: the bearer of accidents), and innumerable other nonschematic but symbolic hypotyposes and expressions for concepts not by means of a direct intuition, but only in accordance with an analogy with it, i.e., the transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond. (CJ, 5: 352-3)

Kant suggests that our language is saturated with indirect representations, and that these representations operate through the infrastructure of analogy. It is this analogical infrastructure, he implies, that makes it possible to confer reality upon

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concepts for which no intuition may ever be directly available. In §59, Kant's intention is not to establish that the beautiful must always symbolise the morally good but to uncover the underlying structure of analogy as the basis of all symbolisation. Symbolisation thereby shows how any concept of reason may acquire a corresponding representation in intuition without committing an amphiboly. By way of analogy, it enables a legitimate extension of the use of understanding making conceivable what an abstract idea of reason might mean *in concreto*, even though it cannot be directly presented.

Kant also indicates that any given sensible object can itself be taken, through this analogically reflective structure of judgement, as a representative of something supersensible. The symbolising power of aesthetic judgement thus has two dimensions. It supplies reason's ideas with an analogous intuition, and it guides the reflection on sensible objects towards corresponding ideas of reason. In doing so, it makes possible a movement within reflective judgement that reaches towards the supersensible, allowing us to reflect on what lies beyond the domain of sensibility without violating its limits.

The structure of analogy reveals that aesthetic judgement, in its very form, is directed beyond the sensible. It can recognise the beautiful as a symbol of the moral, and it can do so without being morally determined in content, because it inherently performs the movement towards the supersensible. This movement is a kind of transition, though not a *generatio*, a production of morality or reason from sensibility. It is a formal feature of aesthetic judgement itself, a reaching beyond the sensible that is already operative in the very structure of reflective judgement, independently of any moral content.

This parallels the 'acquisition' claim to which I referred above. Just as moral cultivation renders freedom recognisable rather than generating it, aesthetic judgement reflects the moral rather than producing it. The formal movement towards the supersensible is already operative in the structure of reflective judgement itself, prior to any moral content. Allison captures this well:

> Insofar as reflection on the beautiful necessarily involves a transition to the supersensible, it mirrors the basic movement of moral reflection. In other words, it is not that taste contributes to the transition (and, therefore, to morality) because it symbolises morality, but rather that it symbolises morality because it already of itself (independently of morality) involves a transition from the sensible to the supersensible. (Allison 2001: 264)

Thus, Kant's method of indirect presentation by analogy applies broadly to any sensible appearance, even concrete actions. But symbolic presentation of ideas in analogy serves as a necessary condition for grasping a given phenomenon through the lens of an idea of reason in general. It is this last point that makes clear why Kant, when he talks about cultivation in his second *Critique*, is evoking a method of reflection that dwells on analogical reflection.

5. The Doctrine of the Method of Pure Practical Reason: beauty and morality

The preceding sections have established the cognitive infrastructure of analogical reflection. I shall now argue that Kant's 'Doctrine of the Method of Pure Practical

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Reason' builds on this reflective use of judgement in order to effect what Kant calls 'the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest' (CJ, 5: 354). In other words, I aim to demonstrate that the very form of aesthetic judgement that Kant elaborates in the *Critique of Judgement* is already invoked in the *Critique of Practical Reason* as the basis for a method by which a moral disposition can be formed in the subject, thus 'making pure practical reason first operative as the motive of action in the individual' (CPrR, 5: 151).

Kant describes the procedure for cultivating a moral disposition under the familiar form of everyday conversation: arguing (*Räsonieren*). Kant does not use the term pejoratively in this context. While he sometimes employs 'arguing' in a dismissive sense, equating it with a misguided use of reason lacking sound judgement (*Vernünftelei*[8]), in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he speaks of arguing in a broader, more neutral sense. There, it refers to the reflective activity of considering the reasons behind someone's actions in order to determine their moral worth. Arguing, he observes, is a form of 'conversation in mixed companies' (CPrR, 5: 153) common to all and one that everyone enjoys, because unlike mere storytelling or jesting it never becomes 'insipid' but instead 'brings a certain liveliness into the company'.

Kant insists – even for children (he only addresses boys (*Knaben*)) as young as ten – that when people argue about the moral worth of an action, that is, when they argue 'about the *moral worth* of this or that action by which the character of some person is to be made out' (CPrR, 5: 153), even those join in with excitement who usually find theoretical arguing tedious. Often, they compete with one another in subtlety, striving either to bring out the purest motive (the highest degree of virtue) or, conversely, to show that a seemingly well-intentioned act is a betrayal of morality. Thus, Kant holds that reasoning reflectively – drawing insight into a person's character from a singular, concrete situation – comes naturally to us and is even exciting. Given this, he wonders why moral education has not yet developed a didactic use of this conversational form. Why has education not yet harnessed young people's delight in discussing moral questions? (5: 154). It is therefore no surprise that in the *Metaphysics of Morals,* Kant refers to this very method as his 'ethical didactics' (MM, 6: 477) and that he develops this method even further. One question is why arguing should be exciting or even joyful in the first place. Kant wants to show that this is the case because of the form of analogical reflection as such.

Already in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant notes that the reason arguing gives such pleasure is that participants feel their faculty of judgement at work, 'which lets us feel our own cognitive powers' (CPrR, 5: 160). So the enjoyment results not from the object reflected on but from the form of reflection, as it lets one see what one is capable of. This joy or delight is experienced through a kind of 'game of judgement' (5: 154). In a playful way, we can judge what is sensibly given as if it were a representation – or more precisely, a symbol – of ideas of reason. In doing so, we experience our capacity to conceive of the sensible world as if it were shaped by freedom, that is, by reason. This imaginative act responds to what Kant describes as a genuine need (*Bedürfnis*) of reason, namely 'that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom' (CJ, 5: 176). This need is itself an expression of what Klemme (2023) describes as reason's self-preservation, that is, reason's drive to sustain itself amid the contingencies of sensible existence by finding, in the sensible world, a reflection of its own lawfulness. Since

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reason demands that we regard the sensible world as being in accordance with reason, and since, as Kant also notes, the 'attainment of every aim is combined with the feeling of pleasure' (5: 187), it follows that the symbolic reflection on nature in light of reason brings us joy. Reasoning by way of symbolisation can therefore be experienced as playful and joyful. Reflecting on vivid examples, especially ones everyone can follow (for instance, asking what character motivates a particular action), exercises the judgement in a way that can yield enjoyment. Allison argues that this pleasure results from the form of symbolisation, but that Kant himself did not show why this should lead to the feeling of duty:

> [I]t is necessary to show how taste and the intellectual interest ensuing from it can themselves help to bridge the gap between nature and freedom by bringing about a transition from sense enjoyment to moral feeling. Unfortunately, Kant does not provide any argument for this. (Allison 2001: 229)

Focusing on the reflection on beauty, Allison is right. Kant does not give an argument that bridges the gap between nature and freedom by way of reflection on beautiful phenomena alone. We will come to this again later. However, Kant grants an educating function to the reflection on beauty with regard to morality. This is evident in reflections as well as in the second *Critique*. In Refl 806, he writes:

> Beautiful objects and beautiful representations of objects wean us from the mere pleasure of enjoyment and from self-interest, and bring the mind closer to morality ... They accustom us to give sensibility to the understanding and to make it healthy and practical. Likewise: to make the idea intuitive and thereby to further morality, in order to unite it with sensible satisfaction ... In sum: taste liberates from the mere senses and recommends itself to the understanding. (Refl 806, 15: 354)

Kant assumes that taste – whether engaged with genuinely beautiful objects or with those merely subjected to aesthetic reflection (and thus not necessarily beautiful) – can in either case bring us closer to morality. This suggests that he is already aware of the structural similarity between moral and aesthetic reflection.[9]

What Kant does not yet seem to grasp, however, is the very point later emphasised by Allison: although aesthetic reflection may play a preparatory role, it is not sufficient in itself to establish the conditions under which the subject becomes receptive to the moral law. At this stage, Kant treats beautiful objects and aesthetic representations as capable of detaching us from self-interest, pleasure, and desire, as if the faculty of taste, or aesthetic reflective judgement, exerted a liberating effect in the contemplation of beauty. What remains unclear to him at this point is that the joy of reflection alone cannot generate moral interest.

Yet this is precisely the insight Kant articulates in the Doctrine of the Method in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.[10] What we can see from Refl 806 – more precisely: from the distinction between beautiful things and beautiful representation (*Vorstellung*) of things – is that we find pleasure in reflection not because of the content reflected on but because of the form of reflection. But in the second *Critique* Kant cautions that this pleasure alone does not yet constitute moral interest:

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> But this employment of the faculty of judgement, which lets us feel our own cognitive powers, is not yet interest in actions and in their morality itself. It merely brings someone to like to entertain himself with such an appraisal and gives to virtue or the cast of mind according to moral laws a form of *beauty*, which is admired but not yet on that account sought (*laudatur et alget*). (CJ, 5: 160)

Thus, Kant clearly regards arguing as an exercise of reflective judgement: a reflection upon examples as symbols of moral goodness. What marks arguing as reflective rather than determining is threefold, involving an epistemic, an aesthetic, and an affective dimension of moral reflection.

First, in arguing we will not know for certain that an action actually is good; we merely reflect on the possible reasons for an action.

Second, as Kant later states in the *Critique of Judgement*, reflecting on the 'magnitude of a certain virtue' (*CJ*, 5: 249) of a person requires a standard that is not determining in the sense of an objective measure by which one could quantitatively compare actions or persons. Rather, when one judges whether someone is virtuous, one does apply a standard and even, as Kant says, 'like theoretical judgments, demand everyone's assent' (5: 248). Yet such judgements cannot specify the superiority of one person over another 'determinately' (5:249). They amount only to what Kant calls an aesthetic judging (ibid.) or an 'aesthetic estimation of magnitude', (5: 251) since they rest on a 'merely subjective standard grounding the reflecting judgment on magnitude' (5: 249). Hence, the judgement of a person's moral worth, like moral arguing itself, belongs to reflective (aesthetic) judgement. It does not subsume particular actions under a universal rule but orients itself by symbolic or exemplary representations of virtue. Kant articulates this explicitly only in the *Critique of Judgement*, yet the systematic implication is already present at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason*: the moral consciousness of virtue presupposes a reflective capacity to recognise and respond to moral exemplarity, not a determining cognition of moral fact.

Third, arguing is in the end itself the object of joy. In this sense, it is not about the object but about the analogical 'language-game' one is playing. Kant says that the pleasure 'is not supposed to be grounded in any concept of the thing' (CJ, 5: 280). It is from the form of this play of faculties that the initial impression of esteem for the good and loathing for the bad stems that inclines one to praise or censure certain actions more readily.

But nonetheless one can see that this affective force remains a habitual response; it does not by itself render the moral law effective in the subject. Something beyond mere pleasure in reflection is required. Arguing is introduced first as a vehicle because it reliably carries one from sensible stimulus to a feeling. But this is not yet necessarily the feeling that has something analogous to moral interest.

The pleasure born of aesthetic reflection does indeed strengthen 'our entire cognitive faculty (understanding and imagination)' and produces a general delight (CPrR, 5: 160), as Kant puts it. Yet this 'pleasure of enjoyment' (CJ, 5: 292) does not by itself engender interest in the existence of its object; we remain, at first, indifferent to its being. Even when that enjoyment arises from recognising ourselves as possessing capacities that transcend our sensibility, it still fails to internalise the moral law as

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the subject's motive. We might be eloquent, competent debaters on behalf of virtue, yet not virtuous. Moreover, if we were to ground morality on this kind of reflection alone, we would be harnessing morality by way of aesthetic modulation of one's character. Such a grounding of morality in the cultivation of good feelings would amount to a form of indoctrination – a line of thought that cannot be pursued here but that deserves separate treatment (Eagleton 1988).

6. The Doctrine of the Method of Pure Practical Reason: the sublime and morality

The preceding section has shown that the pleasure of aesthetic reflection, while preparatory, is not yet sufficient to render the moral law effective in the subject. What is required is a feeling that carries with it not merely delight but seriousness. This feeling is structurally analogous to the constraint of the moral law itself. The sublime becomes decisive at this point.

Moreover, the feeling analogous to respect (*Achtung*) that moral reflection requires cannot be the pleasure of enjoyment of the aesthetic play, but it must impart a certain seriousness to reflective practice. The attitude proper to moral interest must bring with it a seriousness akin to the painful constraint of the moral law, since true duty demands self-limitation, that is, the feeling of not yet being there, an urge to do better. It is in a second step that this urge *can* bring joy:

> [A]lthough this renunciation [of one's own sensual desires] excites an initial feeling of pain, nevertheless, by its withdrawing the pupil from the constraint of even true needs, there is made known to him at the same time a deliverance from the manifold dissatisfaction in which all those needs entangle him and his mind *is made receptive to the feeling of satisfaction from other sources*. The heart is freed and relieved of a burden that always secretly presses upon it. (CJ, 5: 161)

If that feeling of satisfaction is to be thought of as a relief, it thus remains an *indirect* and even *negative* pleasure. Therefore, the facile delight of aesthetic reasoning we considered before may seem ill-suited to effect the moral awakening at hand.

Yet the *double face* of pain and relief indeed finds its aesthetic counterpart in the judgement of the sublime. Kant writes about the feeling of the sublime:

> [It] is a pleasure that arises only indirectly, being generated, namely, by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital powers and the immediately following and all the more powerful outpouring of them; hence as an emotion it seems to be not play but something serious in the activity of the imagination. Hence it is also incompatible with charms, and, since the mind is not merely attracted by the object, but is also always reciprocally repelled by it, the satisfaction in the sublime does not so much contain a positive pleasure as it does admiration or respect, i.e., it deserves to be called negative pleasure. (CJ, 5: 245)

Hence, aesthetic judgement (and therefore analogy) remains the infrastructure through which the movement whereby the subject becomes receptive to moral interest is to be cultivated. In reflecting on examples of truly virtuous character,

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arguing will produce a feeling analogous to respect. This is why reflective judgement can be mobilised for making the moral law subjectively effective. Kant then writes in the Doctrine of the Method of Practical Reason about the way of mobilising it:

> [One has to] draw attention, in the lively presentation of the moral disposition in examples, to the purity of will, first only as a negative perfection of the will insofar as in an action from duty no incentives of inclination have any influence on it as determining grounds; *by this*, however, the pupil's attention is fixed on the consciousness of his freedom and [his] *mind is made receptive to the feeling of satisfaction from other sources*. (CPrR, 5: 160-1)

This 'exercise' relies on selecting striking examples and then guiding reflection so that the listener clearly sees the true motive behind the action. One has to find examples that rule out every motive except respect for the moral law. Kant's example consists in someone who is offered money to slander another – and simply says no. At first, you might think she's just afraid of unknown consequences or maybe rich and not needing money. Kant then turns the screw: she's threatened with violence against herself and her family, even with total ruin – yet she still refuses. No personal desire or fear can explain such resolve. Only a principle rooted purely in duty does. And when we would ask her why she acts that way, she would answer: 'Because it is the one thing to which everyone must consent, regardless of their particular interests'. That is, she is doing what she is doing because she knows it to be good as only knowledge has this kind of objective value (Engstrom 2002). Kant thinks that by choosing examples that force this contrast, and by probing why the action occurs, we help learners experience firsthand how respect for the moral law can stand as our sole, compelling motive. The important question now is, how exactly does this method lead to genuine moral interest? The answer lies in what I have called the acquisition claim.

By way of arguing, the apprentice becomes aware that she can free herself from mere inclination and choose actions worthy of universal assent. But this is not merely an intellectual insight. She recognises that such freedom demands renunciation. Just as reflection on delightful examples of human conduct can produce enjoyment, reflection on examples of renunciation – one might say, ascetic examples – can cause unpleasant feelings. For Kant, this is due to the fact that the faculty of judgement is the faculty of pleasure and displeasure (CJ, 5: 197). As Kant notes, giving up one's inclinations 'costs a great deal', and it is precisely this cost, when confronted in another person's example, that brings the subject's own capacity for freedom as the promise of liberation into view.

In this way the reflective agent sees that, although freedom may lead her through painful self-limitation, it also can offer a deeper relief and satisfaction. It can free her from the inclinations that caused the displeasure in the first place.[11] The desire to 'follow' (*Nachfolge*) the example (R, 6: 62), as Kant will put it later, follows from this promise. Thus, by reflecting analogically on an action as if it sprang from freedom, consciousness of the subject's freedom is acquired, and from this a serious interest in morality is cultivated. This is not a mere imitation of the exemplary figure, but a genuine emulation (*Nachfolge*), motivated by the subject's own longing to actualise the freedom she recognises herself to have from the beginning. She discovers that she

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need not remain enslaved to her inclinations because the very fact that she can have the experience of the sublime testifies to her capacity to act freely. This capacity is itself the condition of the possibility of such an experience. In this way, Kant thinks, symbolic reflection cultivates moral interest. It fosters a moral disposition, which Kant calls a moral sentiment (*Gesinnung*), as a way of perceiving things as morally significant. The concluding section returns to the experience of the sublime, where the acquisition claim receives its clearest expression.

7. Conclusion: sublimity as *ratio cognoscendi* of autonomy

Up to this point, we have established the following: first, the method laid out in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is grounded in the dialogical form of arguing (*Räsonieren*). Yet this mode of argumentation already engages a reflective mode of judgement, functioning analogically (*as-if* consideration). In doing so, it implicitly draws on the principles of aesthetic judgement. However, reflection on the beautiful does not suffice for cultivating moral interest. The reflective method points instead towards the experience of the sublime rather than beauty. Reflection on the beautiful, in light of Kant's method, might be understood as part of a preparatory stage insofar as it awakens an initial pleasure in reflection as such. Naturally, a certain degree of interest and delight in reflective activity must already be present for the method to be meaningfully applied to examples that resonate – albeit indirectly – with moral interest; that is, with examples that manifest the sublime dimension of moral action.

Rather than reading the Doctrine of Method as a didactic model of instruction, in which arguing functions as a heteronomous leading-string (*Gängelband*) that reliably produces moral subjects (Munzel 2011: 183), we should understand it as a portrayal of a kind of reflection that indicates what kind of experience is necessary for cultivating an awareness of one's freedom as the ground of moral agency. Kant's method thus only points towards a possible mode of engaging with one's own experience of the sublime.

Kant does not conceive of moral education as the origin of moral disposition in a subject. He presupposes that some individuals, indeed not few, are already capable of determining their will in accordance with practical reason. At the same time, he acknowledges the existence of others whose characters, for various reasons, render them in a significant respect incapable of responding to the call of reason. This assumption persists throughout Kant's later thought. In *Perpetual Peace*, for instance, Kant entertains the notion of a 'people of devils' (*Volk von Teufeln* (TPP, 8: 366)), understood as a hypothetical case in which moral education is no longer feasible, and the aim becomes the establishment of institutional constraints that compel even morally corrupt individuals to act in accordance with the moral law, if not out of respect for it.

Returning to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the method outlined there for cultivating moral character should not be understood as a direct means of instruction, but as an exemplary case of the kind of experience required to embark on the path of practical knowledge. Kant links this formative moment to what he terms the experience of the sublime. He appears to suggest that certain moments confront us with our own rational nature in a way that moves the heart and awakens moral awareness.

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This aligns with the *Beschluß* of the second Critique. Immediately following the Doctrine of the Method, Kant famously invokes 'the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me' (CPrR, 5: 161). These experiences, in a sense, sublimate our self-worth and prepare us to act in accordance with the ideas of reason necessary to conceive of ourselves as sublime. For such an experience to occur, Kant suggests, one must encounter a situation in which the understanding falters, that is, where something sensibly given cannot be adequately judged by empirical or conceptual means.

Thus, when empirical judgement falters and the pressure to understand intensifies, a shift in the mode of reasoning ensues. One moves from determining to reflective judgement, seeking to reinterpret the situation from a different point of view. At this moment, the ideas of practical reason begin to assert themselves: one may come to regard the action not as determined by inclination, but *as if* it were governed by a non-empirical, rational principle.

Clewis is right that 'the experience of the sublime thus presupposes these ideas; it reveals that the judging subject has practical freedom and a moral vocation' (Clewis 2009: 126). What follows from this presupposition is the central insight of the acquisition claim. The act of recognising that I can understand a sensibly opaque situation only insofar as I am a rational being already presupposes that I understand what it means to be free. This understanding includes the capacity to free me from sensible inclinations, to act from a principle that is not given by nature but self-legislated. Thus, what gives rise to the feeling of the sublime is the idea of my invisible self (*unsichtbaren Selbst* (CPrR, 5: 162)), that is, the idea that I am not part of the sensible world, and that this aspect of myself is perceptible only to the understanding (*nur dem Verstande spürbar* (ibid.). The person whose action I witness is not what strikes me as sublime. Rather, I experience the sublime in myself, in the act of recognising that I can understand – or at least aesthetically attribute meaning to – a sensibly opaque situation only insofar as I am a rational being. Freedom is therefore not the product of the experience of the sublime but its condition, since it was already operative as the ground of my capacity to be struck by the sublime in the first place. This experience renders recognisable (*ratio cognoscendi*) a freedom (*ratio essendi*) that was always mine, and it is this awareness that, as Kant puts it, '[elevates] my worth' (*erhebt … meinen Werth*; ibid.). What the experience then accomplishes is something different and more precise than mere revelation. It motivates me to avail myself, in action, of the very freedom that was already operative as the condition of the experience through which I came to recognise it. This is why the acquisition claim is not an awakening claim. What is acquired through cultivation is not freedom itself but the practical disposition to act from a freedom one already possessed. Moral cultivation, on this reading, is not the *ratio essendi* of freedom but its *ratio cognoscendi*, with the experience of the sublime as its paradigmatic instance.

An analogy helpful for concluding this paper emerges here with *Meno* 84c–d, where Socrates describes a paradox at the heart of learning virtue (see Plato 2007). Virtue, he argues, cannot be taught from without; rather, the learner must acquire it in a manner that resembles recollection. This recollection has, so to speak, a *ratio essendi* – that the learner already bears within them the principles of knowledge – and a *ratio cognoscendi*, namely that they are first seized by a moment of confusion which gives rise to a desire for knowledge. Only then they 'push on in the search gladly … to inquire or learn'.

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Learning, in this view, begins not with information but with a moment of 'perplexity' (*Meno* 84c), paralysis even, that opens up a void, a yearning for understanding that cannot be transmitted but must be uncovered within the subject itself.

Kant, too, emphasises that moral education does not consist in implanting moral principles from the outside, but in creating the conditions under which a capacity already latent within the subject may unfold, namely the capacity to respond to the constraint of the moral law through practical self-determination. Kant's ethical didactics does not aim at moral indoctrination, but at what I have been calling the reflective 'acquisition' of autonomy. What is thereby 'acquired' in this practical self-consciousness is given originally and cannot be derived from other sources. It is not the result of pedagogical instruction, but the fundamental condition of moral experience, and thus also of any possible philosophical pedagogy.

Kant's ethical didactics, then, is not intended as a prescriptive model that teachers can readily apply to 'produce' moral subjects. Rather, the model he outlines draws attention to the fact that moral education depends on a specific kind of aesthetic experience – one that educators may help prepare for, but which they can neither induce nor guarantee. The task of the teacher, thus, is not to instil moral consciousness. Doing so would render moral education heteronomous. Her task is to create the conditions under which the subject might come to such an experience on her own.

Whether Kant's theory of the 'fact of reason' is ultimately convincing must remain an open question (Brandhorst 2024), which it is not the task of this paper to defend. The aim here has been to show that Kant's concept of moral education is interwoven with aesthetic experience in two essential respects. On the one hand, autonomy appears as a matter of taste, insofar as the feeling of the sublime can serve as a *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom; on the other hand, autonomy is also the necessary condition (*ratio essendi*) for acquiring this taste in the first place. For the experience through which freedom becomes recognisable already presupposes the freedom it renders recognisable. Thus, as an *acquired taste,* it is not transmitted but cultivated.

If one were to ask what Kant's Doctrine of Method conveys didactically, the answer would likely be of a negative kind. As a teacher, I am not tasked with teaching what is good but with working reflexively to expose self-deceptions, inertia, or the power of sensuous inclinations, so that the subject may deal with such expositions on behalf of her own capacities. Kant's ethical didactics might then, after all, be understood as a kind of discipline. Not by disciplining someone to feel a certain feeling, but as a 'negative instruction' on the side of the teacher. It teaches us 'To educate negatively. Negative is the wisdom of humanity' (Refl 191, 15: 70).

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers, whose comments prompted me to improve the argument, and Richard Aquila for his thorough proofreading and unstinting support in preparing the paper for publication. I am also grateful to everyone who commented on earlier versions of the paper, which I presented on various occasions, and especially to Bianca Ancillotti, Mario Brandhorst, Lucian Ionel, Heiner F. Klemme, Zdravko Kobe, Conrad Mattli, Sascha Settegast and Daniel Stader.

Notes

1 The translation of *Gesinnung* as 'moral sentiment' is deliberate and requires brief justification. *Gesinnung* contains the root *Sinn*, which means sense or perception. This denotes not only a rational stance but also a cultivated orientation. *Gesinnung*, thus, is a habitual disposition to perceive phenomena in the light of reason. This perceptual and habituated character motivates the translation 'moral

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sentiment'. It should be noted, however, that 'sentiment' here does not refer to mere emotion or natural feeling but to what might be called rationally informed affective responses. These are affects that are structured and elicited by reason itself. Kant's own account of respect (*Achtung*) provides the model. It is 'a feeling that is produced by a rational concept' (CPrR, 5: 73) rather than an empirical impulse. The cultivation described in the Doctrine of Method aims at this kind of affective responsiveness as the affective correlate of rational self-recognition.

2 Except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* (cited according to the standard A/B pagination), Kant's texts are cited according to the Akademie-Ausgabe (Kant 1900ff). Translations of the three *Critiques* follow the Cambridge Edition. All other translations are my own. Abbreviations: CJ (*Critique of the Power of Judgement*), MM (*Metaphysics of Morals*), R (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*), Pr (*Prolegomena*), Anth (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*), Refl (*Reflexionen*).

3 The term *acquisition* is chosen in deliberate reference to Kant's distinction between *acquisitio originaria* and *acquisitio derivativa*. In *On a Discovery*, Kant notes that pure concepts of the understanding are 'not innate, but acquired [*erworben*]', yet their *acquisitio* 'is nonetheless *originaria*' (8: 223). Pure concepts are acquired through the subject's own spontaneity, not received from without. The acquisition of moral sentiment has an analogous structure. It is not acquired, for example, in the way one acquires the ability to play the guitar, that is, through practice that gradually instils a capacity not previously present (*acquisitio derivativa*). It is rather the original appropriation of what the subject's spontaneity already was, that is, the recognition and ownership of a freedom that was the condition of the very experience through which it came to be recognised.

4 For a detailed discussion of the historical development of aesthetics as a science, see Guyer (2014: 421–58).

5 For an account of the productive function of analogy within metaphor, from linguistic, poetic, and philosophical perspectives, see Paul Ricœur, *La Métaphore vive* (Ricœur 1975). For a more systematic discussion of the traditional philosophical form of analogy (A:B :: C:D) and its critique, as well as of the ways in which analogical relations operate within metaphorical expression, see Burrell (1973).

6 Mácha speaks of a 'bridging procedure', but the term should not be taken to imply that symbolic presentation closes a gap between sensibility and reason by generating the latter from the former. Rather, it designates the procedure through which ideas of reason acquire sensible resonance – without collapsing the essential indifference between the two domains.

7 'Not every sign is a symbol; rather, the latter is a sign of a sign. Analogical intuition: symbol' (Refl 3398a, 16: 814). ['nicht jedes Zeichen ist symbol, sondern dieses ~~muß ei~~ ist ein Zeichen vom Zeichen. Analogische Anschauung: symbol'.] The dating of this reflection remains uncertain; Adickes assigns it to the transitional phase between υ and ψ (approximately 1776–1789).

8 'Sophistical reasoning [*Vernünftelei*], without sound judgement, is a use of reason that misses its ultimate end, partly from incapacity, partly from a mistaken point of view' (Anth, 7: 200).

9 The dating of Refl 806 remains uncertain. Adickes states that it is more likely to have been composed before the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. This view can be supported on systematic grounds. The reflection shows Kant is already aware of the structural similarity between moral and aesthetic reflection, but without yet grasping the specific role of the sublime.

10 The question of whether Kant was already aware, when writing the second *Critique*, of the role that reflection on the sublime – distinct from reflection on beauty – plays in the development of moral interest is a matter of scholarly debate. See Tonelli (1954) for a dissenting view.

11 At this point I depart from Kant's position. I do not think that this promise suffices; in fact, I do not even think it clarifies what it is that the experience of the sublime might liberate us from. In what follows, I will outline Kant's account. In a separate paper, I intend to argue that the feeling of the sublime reveals that, if we want to be free from the sway of other inclinations, we must subordinate ourselves to reason. In other words, we are confronted with the necessity of choosing whom – or what – to subordinate ourselves to; we are not, in any strong sense, freed from subordination altogether. This subtle shift marks the threshold at which aesthetics becomes either ideology (Eagleton 1988) or its critique.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S136941542610154X Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Cite this article: Pfeiffer, R. Moral Sentiment as an Acquired Taste: Kant on Moral Cultivation through Analogical Reflection. *Kantian Review*. https://doi.org/10.1017/S136941542610154X

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