

# Review of: "Symbolic art of the highest Artist: natural purposes in Kant's third Critique"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

## One Kant, One Mind, One System

Comments on Daniel Haig, "Symbolic art of the highest Artist: natural purposes in Kant's third Critique"

The author has done a great job in interpreting Kant's third critique. In the first sentence of the abstract, he claims to consider the work as a single whole. "An interpretation of Immanuel Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment is presented as a coherent whole rather than a collection of disconnected parts." This statement was surprising to me, as I have always read the work as not only coherent in itself, but systematically fully connected with the first two critiques. Much of the literature I have read is of the same opinion. In my short post I will deal mainly with this issue, and of course I cannot go into nearly enough detail. It is also not clear to me what the author's purpose is in presenting the third critique with long quotes -- even if read back to back. This could be more like the material for an academic course, but not necessarily a published article. The reader can read at length the passages and paraphrases of Kant that he knows. Of course, a work can only be read clearly and coherently backwards if it was coherent forwards. I also see some terminological problems in the text, one or two of which I have pointed out.

My procedure will be to highlight a few passages from the text in quotation marks and add my comments.

**"CPJ is commonly interpreted as an aggregate of disconnected parts even though CPJ itself finds purposiveness in the mutual dependence of parts of a harmonious whole."**

I don't think this is a general interpretation. Kant's original aim was to discover the human mind as the origin and condition of knowledge and thus of truth. This is the subject of the first critique. He had to write the second critique (he discovered the need for it while writing the first critique) because there were aspects of the human mind that he could not explain using the axioms of the first critique. (Kant does not use the term "axiom" in his philosophy or for his philosophy, nor was his philosophy intended to be axiomatic. But it can be shown that he has some basic propositions that function as axioms in the first critique). The second critique is about the laws of human action, the freedom of the mind, and consequently ethics and the good.

Already when writing the first critique, he realised that he could not give a priori principles to the power of judgement. He later found this principle (he wrote a letter about finding it). The third critique is an integral part of the Critique of Pure Reason, written later. If he had recognized the a priori principle of the power of judgement when writing the first critique,

it would certainly have been part of the first critique, presumably much shorter. There is no separation or independence of any kind between the parts. As the author writes, many people read only parts of the third critique. This is a mistake and an error. The three critiques should be read together, one after the other, starting with the first. But since it is a whole and coherent system, one can start with the second or third critique and then continue with the others. Understanding it is then more difficult, but not impossible, because the whole work is strongly systematic, a single system.

At the end of the paper, the author returns to his claim that Kant's work does not really form a coherent system. It is a common saying that if something is not broken, don't fix it. According to the author, interpretations see the work as a disjointed, disorganised work. He writes: **“CPJ is commonly interpreted as an aggregate of weakly connected parts (“a dog’s dinner” Gardner 2016) but I have attempted to interpret it as a strongly integrated whole.”** In fact, it was not difficult for the author, since the work is a highly integrated whole. This is confirmed not only by the preface and the introduction to the critiques, but also by most interpreters. The majority of Kant interpreters agree that Kant's works, and in particular his works on the mind (the three Critiques), form a single coherent system.

Elsewhere, the author seems to contradict himself by writing: **“Kant regards the faculties of the mind as an organized whole, the parts of the mind as mutually self-sustaining and existing for the purpose of the whole. Therefore, the a priori principle of the reflective power of judgment must support the moral ideas of practical reason”.**

Kant sees the mind as an organized whole, which is in fact one of Kant's starting premises. And if it is an acquired unity, then each part and the examination of the parts must have its place, and so it is in the CPR.

**Much of the obscurity of CPJ devolves on the question, what is the significance of natural beauty and the purposiveness of natural purposes? My central contention is that Kant interprets them as symbols of the prowess and goodness of a supreme artist that confirm and support us in our pursuit of moral ends.**

The natural beauty and purposiveness of nature or world (nature and world are both “Inbegriff aller Erscheinungen” — Epitome of all phenomena) is the “result” of the activity of the human mind (Gemüt). Kant writes of a supreme artist (obere Weltursache, intelligente Weltursache, verständiger Welturheber - supreme cause of the world, intelligent cause of the world, origin of the world): § 85. Here he stresses that physical theology can open up nothing about the ultimate purpose of creation (“kann nichts von einem Endzwecke der Schöpfung eröffnen”). The first critique does not even allow us to ask the question. The concept of an intelligible cause of the world is only subjective, but it does not apply to an object, i.e. it does not apply to anything. Physical theology cannot be the basis for theology, “it will always remain a physical teleology”. It cannot discuss the purpose of the world, which is outside the world. We cannot even conceive of the world as a whole, nor can we establish its infinity or finitude, the rationalist or empiricist argument intervenes. This is illustrated in the main section of the first critique, “The Antinomy of Pure Reason” (A405-567, B432-595). The concept of the supreme intelligible cause of the world, that is, the possibility of theology, depends on a concrete conception of the purpose of this world. And we cannot have a concrete, definite idea of this purpose when we cannot even have knowledge of the world as a whole.

Since we cannot have a conception of the world as a whole, we cannot have a definite conception of the purpose of world

and, finally, of the cause of the world. At least as far as knowledge and common understanding are concerned.

**In overview, I interpret CPJ as an extended argument that theology cannot be grounded in the empirical study of nature but that the beauty and purposiveness of nature suggest and confirm the existence of an intelligent world-cause.**

This is correct, but only in a subjective and practical and not in a theoretical sense. That means, we cannot make science of it, see §87. Note 424: "Dieses moralische Argument soll keinen objektiv-gültigen Beweis vom Dasein Gottes an die Hand geben ... es ist ein *subjektiv*, für moralische Wesen, hinreichendes Argument." ("This moral argument is not intended to provide objectively valid proof of God's existence ... it is a subjectively sufficient argument for moral beings.")

The subjective supposition of the existence of God comes from morality.

### **Aesthetic judgment**

**The Critique of the aesthetic power of judgment (§1–§60) is commonly read for what it says about human art but its principal subject is natural beauty for which human art serves as an analogy. My analysis will begin with five key-passages (I–V below).**

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The author claims **"that Kant advocates an intentional God who is represented in the sensible world by aesthetic attributes (symbols) that sustain our moral vocation."**

God is a requirement of practical reason: the moral man says, "I will that there be a God," Kant writes at the end of his second critique.

There are several problems with the author's statement.

The author stresses symbols, although, as he says, Kant does not talk much about them, not only in the third, but also in the first two critiques. Symbols provide a way of representing the requirement of practical reason in the sensuous world without, in today's parlance, ascribing to them ontological or theoretical status. The term "representation" is extremely loaded, and Kant shows precisely that God is not "representable". Representation, moreover, for Kant is 'Vorstellung', which is above all intuition and concept. God is not representable not only because symbols do not represent, but also because the first elements of representation for Kant are intuition and concept, and it is precisely in § 59 that he shows (257) that neither concept nor intuition (the constituent elements of cognition and representation) can refer to God. Just one example from the quoted page: "symbolische ... Ausdrücke für Begriffe nicht vermittelt einer direkten Anschauung, sondern nur nach einer Analogie mit derselben, d. i. der Übertragung der Reflexion über einen Gegenstand der Anschauung auf einen ganz anderen Begriff, dem vielleicht nie eine Anschauung direkt korrespondieren kann" ("symbolic ... expressions for concepts not by means of a direct intuition, but only after an analogy with it, i.e. the transfer of the reflection on an object of intuition to a completely different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond"). This is anything but representation. A further problem with this expression is that it is not at all correct to say

that "(symbols) ... sustain our moral vocation". Our moral vocation is the original, irreducible law of reason, and we do not need symbols to maintain it. This is also what he writes about in his work on religion. Symbols are merely means of expression, nothing more. So God is not represented by symbols, but at most expressed by symbols.

**In the second Critique (1788) a rational being should wish to be without inclinations but inclinations play a positive role in Religion within the bounds of bare reason (1793). This shift is already noticeable in CPJ of 1790 in which feelings of pleasure and displeasure play a positive role (Guyer 1990).**

I do not think there was a shift in Kant with regard to inclinations. It is merely that in CPJ and the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* he simply talks about something different. In the definition of the moral good, in the application of the categorical imperative, inclinations, emotions, natural impulses, or instincts still cannot play a role. CPJ is not about defining ethics, but about the reflexive functioning of cognitive faculties, and this is where Lust and Unlust appear. We are in a quite different place from talking about the conscious, rational definition of morality -- for here we are talking about a different kind of functioning of the faculties that "produce" or generate rationality. It is as if rationality were the mirror -- and here we are looking at the workings of the back of the mirror from the back. So the shift the author refers to is not a change of opinion, but merely a "going elsewhere" in the system of mind.

This is exactly what Kant writes about in paragraph 88: **Kant never wavers in his ascription of intelligence and intentions to an original understanding that is ultimately responsible for purposiveness in the world including the purposiveness of our cognitive faculties.**

This is of course only subjectively valid. That is, the subject's morality can only be held as practical rationality by such an assumption, and the purposiveness experienced in the phenomenal world can only be made plausible to the subject by such an assumption. While Kant in the first critique claims that from and about this we cannot construct science and knowledge. We assert what we do not know. Credo quia absurdum est.

**CPJ affirms the nature of the subject. The objective world is presented in subjective experience and understood by the subject. A subjective principle can be as certain as if it were an objective principle. Our subjectivity is necessary for us and enables us to think objectively of other subjects.**

In CPJ, Kant cannot help but do so: all three of Kant's critiques speak of the subject as the only necessary one in terms of both theory and practice, cognition, knowledge and action. If we use this expression, Kant's whole philosophy affirms the subject.

The objective world is not just a subjective experience, but is in fact constructed, the result of cooperation. It is the result of the encounter between the subject as thing in itself and the world as thing in itself. The objective world exists only in and through this cooperation for the subject, that is, for us. Not only is the subjective principle as certain as if it were objective, but it is the subjective principle alone, the structure of the transcendental subject, that is certain according to Kant. There is no objective principle for Kant as I see it, at most the principle of objectivity, but that depends entirely on the subject. Objectivity is only for the subject and only by the subject, through the subject, with the subject's cooperation. The

subject is necessary -- the nature and the quality of the object is not.