

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

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David Haig's article "Symbolic art of the highest Artist: natural purposes in Kant's third Critique" systematizes and interprets in a highly original way the natural teleology of early and late Kant from the perspective of the artistry of a supreme (divine) creator; indeed, human 'judgmental power' unsuccessfully seeks a certainty in humanity's production of the good (as a supreme moral goal) analogous to the certainty with which the creator realized 'intelligent design' – assuming that the concept of a thing is the purpose of a thing (and thus not merely a function, or integration) especially in the case of animate beings (organisms and organs). According to Kant, human cognition approaches the divine creator's rules and purposes at the "symbolic" level. Indeed, with Kant, the divine genius and artistry can still be (both philosophically and theologically) defended. For this reason, among others, Hegel criticized the involvement of "philosophical reason" in the realm of faith and theology in Kant (see Hegel's *Faith and Knowledge*).

There is also, of course, an analogy to the beauty of works of art as such, for which the power of judgment has no unquestionable rules – for Kant's aesthetic judgment of taste is completely free as to the judgment of beauty – because it is subjective (interestingly, also civic judgment in Kant is subjective; "freies Spiel"), unlike moral judgment (in terms of principles, maxims, imperatives, etc.) or in general: judgment in teleological terms of the scientific type (Kant: "Beauty in nature, since it is ascribed to objects only in relation to reflection on their outer intuition ... can rightly be called an analogue of art").

At the same time, the Author does not consider Kantian philosophy of living organisms anachronistic (although it is certainly more scholastic compared to the philosophy of organism and environmental totalities – including cosmic – with smooth transition from chemism, physicalism, inorganic matter to organic matter and teleology in Hegel's "Philosophy of Nature"). Particularly noteworthy are the insightful analyses of the concept of purposiveness and purpose in Kantianism, including 1) autotelic purposiveness, when an organism or organism achieves its purpose in its own functioning, 2) purposiveness external to the living organism – but also to the moral agent; 3) the situation in which the permanence of a living being or species is the immanent (internal) purpose of that being, 4) purposeless purposiveness manifesting rather epigenetic changes on living beings' shape than serious – natural or supranatural – purposiveness, etc. (by the way, Blumenbach and Kant valued the so-called formative force = "Bildungstrieb" which could contribute to the Author's idea of natural purposeful creativity, see for instance Richards, 2000; <https://home.uchicago.edu/rjr6/articles/Kant%20and%20Blumenbach.pdf>).

The Author is also interested in the relationship between teleology and theology within Kantianism, as well as the

abandonment of reasonable physicotheology in favor of reasonable ethicotheology; this leap has left us with little interest in early and pre-critical Kant today. According to the Author – along with Kant – at every stage of Kantianism we can legitimately ask: why, to what end something exists in nature or as nature – and not only by the power of nature itself or forces and rules immanent to the universe (just as we ask, or even should ask, why and to what end something comes into existence through human moral action, social and political practice, artistic creation, and finally technical and morally indifferent action). Thus the Author consequently argues that with Kant “that a purely mechanical explanation of natural purposiveness is unattainable. The mechanical principle must be subordinated to the teleological principle”; and this even in the context of evolution (with modern concepts of evolution already rejecting the ultimate goal of evolution, to which a development initiated by some single preoriginal and universal (‘mother-like’) entity would linearly lead). It is worth remembering that early theories of evolution (which include Kant’s) – like theories of history – were supposed to pursue certain goals and fulfill certain concepts, or at least move in the right direction, and reason would recognize this direction. In Kant’s case, even nature is accompanied by “providence,” some form of reason that provides physical nature with metaphysical aspects. Also, Kant’s concept of history shows promising – because progressive – aspects.

But isn’t this a surplus of teleology in Kantianism? Is teleology in such abundance still maintainable today? This question is direct to the consideration of the Author of this highly valuable article. It is not only that “Hume had argued that the facile ascription of the purposiveness of nature to a divine mind explained nothing because one could then ask from whence came the purposiveness and attributes of this mind” (which was not a real difficulty to Kant).

Nowadays scientists hypothesize that human beings (or humanity as we know it) is not necessarily the ultimate achievement of natural evolution – it is one of parallel and various achievements. And if humans would be an ultimate achievement of supra-natural (divine, respectively) creation, do they represent an overarching achievement to which the rest of creation is (let us think of the ecological crisis), or should be subordinate? Can we meaningfully answer such questions within the framework of Kantianism? Can we transcend the fetters of anthropocentric teleology?

Is *philosophizing with Kant* about what ‘anthropocene’ means and implies still possible, and what after ‘anthropocene’? Such questions seem legitimate especially in the light of Kant’s implicit advocacy for biodiversity – according to the following paragraph of the paper under discussion: “The *Critique of the teleological power of judgment* opens with a general consideration of objective purposiveness in nature (§61). In our subjective appreciation of nature, the variety and unity of beautiful forms strengthens and entertains the mental powers ‘as if they had actually been designed for our power of judgment’ (...) is *not thinkable and explicable* in accordance with any analogy to any physical, i.e., natural capacity...” = indeed, however, biological and organismic levels are not completely disconnected from the physical and chemical ones). However, I am thinking merely with Hegel who re-combined those abstracted levels together; as “Genius really consists in the happy relation” (§ 49, Kant’s *Critique III*) and nature as “a system in accordance with empirical laws must be possible if one is to think of the former as a system (*as must indeed be done*)”, as accurately cited by the Author – and already anticipating Hegel’s conceptualization of nature. What Kant is missing, would be exactly Hegel’s philosophical and all essential aspects-encompassing, speculative concept of nature; but natural subjective minds do not dispose at such concepts. Kant remains a thinker of an individual, natural, experiential *and* judging human mind; and his approach to this



mind is fully convincing. And the Author was able to systematically introduce this approach in only one, high-quality paper without the slightest fault. Congratulation!