**‘The Beautiful is the Symbol of the Morally Good’:**

**Judgments of Beauty and the Supersensible in Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgment**

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***Abstract*** In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment,*Kant claims that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good”. In this article I offer an interpretation of this claim. According to Kant's conception of a symbol, the form of judgment operative in judgments of beauty can also be applied to morality, highlighting for us that we are directed at an end which cannot be determined by theoretical cognition. I argue that beauty’s symbolism of morality depends upon the solution to the Antinomy of Taste, and Kant's conclusion that judgments of taste are grounded in the concept of the supersensible. Such an interpretation renders intelligible Kant's remark that judgment makes possible a transition from nature to morality. Namely, beauty demonstrates to us nature’s openness to transcendence, and thus is a symbol, a making-sensible of our own transcendence and practical determination of nature.

**1 Introduction**

Kant may not seem like the philosopher to approach for an account of the relationship between goodness, truth, and beauty. Kant is associated with deflating the pretensions of theoretical reason and providing a regimented moral framework, reliant on a notion of freedom that is independent of our everyday, phenomenal experience. One might, with good reason, characterize Kant’s Critical philosophy in terms of stark divisions: nature vs. freedom; theoretical vs. practical reason. For Kant (one might contend), theoretical knowledge is divorced from moral goodness; our experience of beauty, as something belonging to appearances and, moreover, as merely subjective, appears to intersect meaningfully neither with objective theoretical knowledge nor with moral goodness.

Yet in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* written in 1790, Kant draws attention to and problematizes his division between nature and freedom, saying that there is an “incalculable gulf” between the sensible domain of nature and the supersensible domain of freedom. The power of judgment, Kant states,“provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical” (*KU* Introduction 5:196). In light of these comments in the Introduction, both major parts of this *Critique*—both the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment and the Critique of Teleological Judgment—can be read as achieving this end. Judgment, both aesthetic and teleological, mediates and makes possible a transition between nature and freedom, or between the theoretical and the practical. As I show below, judgments of beauty provide a transition from nature to freedom through beauty’s symbolism of morality; such symbolism is made possible by the grounding of judgments of taste on the concept of the supersensible.

Kant’s solution to the Antinomy of Taste, that the concept of the supersensible grounds judgment of taste, is crucial to interpreting the claim that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” (§59 5:353). Rather than a mere analogical relation between beauty and morality, according to which they share some structural features, this claim of beauty’s symbolism depends upon the concept of the supersensible and its grounding of judgments of taste. The beautiful object induces in the subject a cognitive reaction with the form of purposiveness. This purposive activity, the harmony of the faculties, is distinctive in making a purpose conspicuously absent according to theoretical cognition, thus pointing us beyond our sensible nature to the supersensible. Beauty indicates to the spectator that the physical world, with all the sensible objects of theoretical cognition, depends upon something outside of it. This sensible judgment can be analogously applied to the supersensible object of practical reason, thereby demonstrating how all things can be taken up and ordered by our supersensible moral freedom. This is the content of the claim that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and in this way the claim both depends upon and goes beyond the claim that judgments of taste are grounded in a concept of the supersensible.

In what follows, I first give a preliminary interpretation of the claim that beauty is a symbol of morality, and an overview of various interpretations of that claim (section 2). I then argue that beauty’s symbolism depends upon the solution to the Antinomy of Taste, and Kant's conclusion that judgments of taste are grounded in the concept of the supersensible (section 3). Finally, in section 4, I show how the analogical application of the form operative in judgments of beauty can be applied to morality, and that such an application renders intelligible Kant's remark that judgment makes possible a transition from nature to morality. Namely, beauty makes sensible the purposive determination of a manifold in the absence of a purpose, pointing us to the supersensible as the determining ground of that purposiveness. Applied to the morally good, this form of judgment highlights the manner in which my inclinations, theoretical cognition, and nature can conform to my supersensible, moral causality. Beauty demonstrates to us nature’s openness to transcendence, and thus is a symbol, a making-sensible of our own transcendence and practical determination of nature.

**2 Beauty as the Symbol of the Morally Good**

In the “Analytic of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment” Kant lays out several core features of aesthetic judgment: it is disinterested; it commands universal assent; it is subjective, meaning that aesthetic judgment is made on the basis of the state of the subject’s faculties, rather than a cognized feature of the object. The beautiful object is “purposive without a purpose”, which means that it bears the form of purposiveness without a determinate purpose applying to the object. Our representation of the object is such that no one concept is adequate to determine it. The result for our faculties is that the imagination is put into “play” with the understanding, with a lawfulness which is suited to the imposition of concepts, but without the imposition of a determinate concept. In other words, our representation of the object is purposive in form for our faculties of cognition, without a determinate purpose or end imposed by the understanding, and there is no *determinate* rule to which this purposive form conforms.

In the Dialectic of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, Kant makes the claim that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” (§59 5:353). This claim involves, at least in part, some shared features between judgments of beauty and morality that Kant describes in the opening sections of his discussion of beauty: Both please immediately and without any preceding interest, both involve a spontaneity which is nevertheless lawful, and both command universal assent.

According to Kant’s discussion of symbols in §59, a symbol is a kind of “making sensible”, through an “indirect presentation” of a concept “by means of an analogy” (5:352). In this case, then, the beautiful makes sensible morality, by means of an analogy. Kant sums this up at the end of Dialectic: “Taste is at bottom a faculty for the judging of the sensible rendering of moral ideas (by means of a certain analogy of the reflection on both)” (§60, 5:356). There are two main ways of construing this claim, the judgment-centered view and the object-centered view.

One might think that this symbolism exhausted by the *structural* features of *judgments* of beauty and morality, mentioned above.[[1]](#footnote-1) Call this the judgment-centered view. This is a fairly minimalist sense of symbol. Interpreted in this way, beauty’s symbolism of morality would not amplify the understanding of either; it would be something we notice once we understand both judgments of beauty and morality well. One purpose of noticing the symbolism is that it gives us reasons to seek out beauty in the service of moral cultivation. There are some *prima facie* problems with this view. First is that in identifying the symbolism in the structural parallels between two kinds of judgment, the central feature of symbolism—that it is a making-sensible—is entirely removed; one judgment does not “make sensible” another.[[2]](#footnote-2) Secondly, the transition discussed in the Introduction, according to which judgment makes possible a transition from nature to freedom, remains mysterious. Mere structural similarities do not accomplish a transition.[[3]](#footnote-3) And finally, the asymmetry of the claim is mysterious; some interpretations along these lines undercut the justification for beauty symbolizing morality rather than morality symbolizing beauty.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Others have claimed that beauty is the making sensible of *particular* moral ideas.[[5]](#footnote-5) This interpretation would focus on the particular moral content of works of art. In this case, a painting of Jupiter’s eagle would symbolize God, and it is a beautiful work of art insofar as it successfully does this. Call this the object-centered view.[[6]](#footnote-6) Such a view focuses on Kant’s account of genius and aesthetic ideas, representations of the imagination to which no concept is adequate. There are two *prima facie* problems with this view: First, it is not clear how natural beauties can function as a symbol via aesthetic ideas; Second, it appears to exclude artwork that does not invoke morality. Allison (2001: 258–62) attempts to address the second problem by showing how judgments of beauty can be characterized by a striving toward transcendence, yet it remains unclear why the transcendent should be then equivocated with morality. If Kant had meant merely that the beautiful symbolizes the transcendent or supersensible as such, one would think that he would have limited himself to that more modest claim.

My purpose here is not to refute these views, but to present an alternative according to which Kant’s invocation of the concept of the supersensible as grounding judgments of beauty makes possible beauty’s symbolism of morality. Recall that in the Introduction, Kant claims that “the power of judgment provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical” (5:196). Aesthetic judgment bears the form of purposiveness without a purpose, and is grounded in the concept of the supersensible. This grounding in the supersensible means that beauty is a manifestation of the determination of the sensible objects of theoretical cognition by something beyond them. This form of judgment is then applied to the morally good, which is the subordination of our inclinations to the moral law. Beauty thus makes sensible in intuition this subordinating unity. Kant’s transition thereby consists in this symbolism: On the side of aesthetic judgment, the transition is *from* the theoretical-sensible object of beauty, and its purposive subordination (without a purpose) to something beyond the sensible *to* the practical-supersensible object of morality, and the purposive subordination of everything to this moral end.

This approach takes elements from both views: it is an object-centered view, in that it is the beautiful object itself which is doing the symbolizing, yet it avoids the problems characteristic of this view by not relying on the notion of aesthetic ideas, but rather by considering the connection primarily to the concept of the supersensible which is discussed in Kant’s resolution to the Antinomy of Taste. Beauty makes sensible the supersensible object of morality. The structural similarities between types of judgment are part of the sensible presentation of the supersensible object; they are neither the justification nor the conclusion of the claim to symbolism*.* One problem with the above interpretations of beauty’s symbolism is that they interpret it to be something justified by such similarities. But rather, these similarities are operative in one step of explicating the symbol. Put a different way, symbolism is an attitude taken toward a supersensible object to explicate aspects of it to ourselves. The symbolism is not something justified by an antecedently-determined similarity, nor can the import of the symbol be to make known to us those similarities, since they are known to us already. Rather, symbolism is a form of presentation by which some aspect of a supersensible object is made sensible to us.

Crucially, the sensible object is not *analogous to* the supersensible, even though it is symbolic of it. Kant states that symbol makes sensible “by means of an analogy” (§59 5:352). The claim is not that the sensible is analogous to the supersensible, but rather that the symbol, the making sensible, occurs *by means of* an analogy. Kant explains the task of judgment in the analogy as follows:

The power of judgment performs a double task, first applying the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then, second, applying the mere rule of reflection on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the first is only the symbol. (§59 5:352)

The symbolism is between *two different objects*, in this case, the beautiful object and the supersensible object determined by practical reason, i.e., the good.[[7]](#footnote-7) The analogy is not between these objects; rather, the analogy consists in the “mere rule” or “form” by which I judge beauty being applied in reflection to the morally good.

In §59, Kant explains how beautiful objects connect us to the supersensible, by means of judgment. He states that the faculty of judgment sees itself as related to the supersensible “on account of this inner possibility in the subject as well as on account of the outer possibility of a nature that corresponds to it” (§59 5:353). In judgments of the beautiful, Kant here claims, the faculty of judgment is related to the supersensible on account of the correspondence of the sensible object with the spectator’s subjectivity. This supersensible is “in the subject and outside of it” (§59 5:353); the supersensible is both the ground of the freedom of the subject and the substratum of nature.[[8]](#footnote-8) The form of this judgment is then applied to a different object, the morally good, which is also purposive in nature without being determined by the understanding.

In sum: the concept of the supersensible is applied to a beautiful object, resulting in a form of judgment which Kant characterizes as purposive, without a determinate purpose applied by the understanding. This form of judgment is then applied to the morally good as an object which the beautiful symbolizes. This highlights certain aspects of morality, particularly its purposive subordination of inclinations and nature. Beauty thereby functions to make moral freedom sensible and intelligible to us.

This interpretation disambiguates between the supersensible *object* that beauty symbolizes (the morally good) and the supersensible *concept* which grounds the judgment of taste—that is, the supersensible as such, which Kant introduces in the resolution to the Antinomy. These are two separate invocations of the supersensible in these sections of the Dialectic; they ought to be kept distinct.[[9]](#footnote-9) The import of beauty’s symbolism depends explicitly on the form of judgment expounded in that resolution; let us turn now to the Antinomy. What I show in the following section is the meaning of the claim that the concept of the supersensible grounds judgments of beauty: In such judgments, a theoretically-determinate purpose is absent in a conspicuous way.

**3 The Antinomy of Taste and the Concept of the Supersensible**

The universal validity of aesthetic judgment is in tension with the subjectivity of aesthetic judgment; that is, if aesthetic judgment is based on a purely subjective experience of pleasure, we are not justified in asserting that others ought to experience this object in the same way. Kant expresses this tension in the Antinomy of Taste in terms of the possibility of disputing about aesthetic judgment; if an aesthetic judgment is not based on concepts, it is not clear how such judgments lay claim to the assent of others (§56). He resolves the Antinomy by claiming that aesthetic judgments *are* based on concepts, but not determinable concepts of the understanding, but rather on the “transcendental concept of reason of the supersensible … which cannot be further determined theoretically” (§57, 5:339).

Kant characterizes the aesthetic judgment as based in a subjectivity of form in the experience. An aesthetic judgment, he states,

relates the representation by which an object is given solely to the subject, and does not bring to our attention any property of the object, but only the purposive form in the determinationof the powers of representation that are occupied with it. (§15 5:228).

The judgment, then, does not latch onto any cognizable feature of the object, but instead is made due to features of the subject’s faculties in such a judgment.It is difficult to reconcile this subjectivity of aesthetic judgment with its universal validity, especially when such judgments are not about subjects, but about objects. This has led some commentators (e.g., Guyer (1997): 263–4) to the conclusion that Kant has made an error here, and others (e.g., Allison (2001): 177) to interpret Kant as advancing the weaker thesis that everyone should have an aesthetic sense, and be capable of aesthetic judgments, without the stronger claim that judgments about particular objects command universal assent. However, this is contraindicated by Kant’s many examples of aesthetic judgment, which are invariably object-directed.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Kant argues from the universal validity and the impossibility of proof or demonstrability of beauty to the claim that the concept of the supersensible grounds the judgment of beauty. In order to explain these two features of aesthetic judgment, such judgment must be based on a concept that is not a concept of the understanding, but rather “the transcendental concept of reason of the supersensible” or that of the “supersensible substratum of humanity” (§57 5: 339–340). Kant states that “by means of this very concept [the judgment of taste] acquires validity for everyone” (§575 5:340), and that the supersensible invoked in this concept grounds the object itself.[[11]](#footnote-11) Kant explains the resolution to the Antinomy as follows:

Nevertheless, the judgment of taste doubtlessly contains an enlarged relation of the representation of the object (and at the same time of the subject), on which we base an extension of this kind of judgment, as necessary for everyone, which must thus be based on some sort of concept, but a concept that **cannot** be determined by intuition, by which nothing can be cognized, and which thus also **leads to no proof** for the judgments of taste. A concept of this kind, however, is the mere pure rational concept of the supersensible, which grounds the object (and also the judging subject) as an object of sense, consequently as an appearance” (§57 5:339–340).

This is perplexing, since it is not clear what is meant by the judgment of beauty being “based on” or a concept of reason of the supersensible. Such a concept is not typically invoked in judgments of beauty, whereas judgments of ordinary sensible object typically invoke a concept. For example: “that is a lamp” applies the concept of lamp, and is based on that concept in a way that is fairly clear. But in aesthetic judgment, one does not typically use the concept of the supersensible at all; the explicit possession of the concept should not be requisite for judgments of beauty.

We can make sense of the role of the concept of the supersensible through the purposive form of a judgment of beauty, which necessarily points beyond the sensible object. To say it “points beyond” is perhaps too metaphorical; more literally, the concept of the supersensible is part of the structure of the judgment, although the subject need not think that concept in judgment. It is the *felt incompleteness* of the judgment, the conspicuous absence of a purpose, which provides the spectator an openness to something beyond the sensible. Something plays the role of a purpose, providing fodder for the imagination and a particular purposive form of judgment, but that thing is decidedly not sensible. We must locate it therefore *not* in the sensible, but in that which is beyond the sensible, i.e., the supersensible.

Michelangelo’s *Pietà* gives rise to a peculiar relation of my faculties, which Kant describes as the form of purposiveness. Kant’s account describes this paradigmatic experience of beauty in a way that accurately captures certain features of it. The imagination produces an abundance of representations in cognition, without any one concept being adequate to these representations. Implicit in the judgment is a demand that others judge it this way as well. The crucial aspect of the experience is something I cannot describe discursively. One can talk at length about the *Pietà* and its various features: the nobility, youth, and innocence of Mary, the dissonance of the mother cradling the dead Christ as if holding a sleeping child. Yet there is no determinable feature of the object which we can identify as that which makes it beautiful; there is no determinate feature that it has in common with other objects we deem beautiful. The whole experience is directed at *something*, but that *something* is not given in appearances. Perhaps that *something* does not exist and the experience is a mere subjective and idiosyncratic reaction, in which case the claim to universal validity would be baseless. Kant is not concerned about refuting this skeptical option, but is rather considering what makes possible judgment of taste as he has explicated it, including its universal validity. The other option is that there *is* something grounding this whole experience, but it is beyond the realm of appearances, it is in the supersensible. In this way the judgment of taste would be an experience of a purpose that transcends the realm of appearances; we sensibly experience our inability to cognize that which grounds the experience. Any accurate description of this experience will thereby appeal to that which transcends the sensible. A person need not describe her judgment in these terms in order for her judgment to have these features: Whether she realizes it or not, her judgment is grounded in the concept of the supersensible.

This is the first step of the transition in the Introduction: Judgments of the beauty of sensible objects are grounded in and directed at the supersensible. The purposiveness of form in judgments of beauty demonstrates nature’s openness to determination that comes not from the laws and concepts of theoretical cognition, but from a supersensible ground; in this way “the aesthetic judgment on certain objects (of nature or of art) […] occasions [*veranlaßt*] [the concept of the purposiveness of nature]” (Introduction 5:197).[[12]](#footnote-12) But the transition that Kant discusses in the Introduction is from concepts of nature to the concept of freedom, from the theoretical to the practical, and so the grounding of judgments of beauty in the supersensible is not itself such a transition: It does not invoke the practical at all. There must be some other feature of aesthetic judgment in which we can locate the transition, which is to moral freedom. This is beauty’s symbolism of morality.

With this explication of the role of the concept of the supersensible in judgments of beauty now in place, we can now say what it is about this form of judgment which can then be applied analogously to the morally good. In section 4 below, I give an overview of the central features of morality which are highlighted by beauty’s symbolism.

**4 Morality and the Determination of Nature**

Recall above that several commentators take the import of Kant’s claim of beauty’s symbolism of morality to be exhausted by the structural similarities between beauty and morality. A more adequate interpretation will not identify the import of the claim that the beautiful object symbolizes morality with the structural similarities which are already known to us in the mere comparison of the two. A mere “compare and contrast” reading of Kant’s claim is deflationary. If this is the sense of symbol, then anything can symbolize anything, if we can name some property that such things share. On such a reading, the exercise of identifying symbols adds nothing to our comprehension, since the justification and the result are the same: we identify a similarity, claim symbolism, which demonstrates to us the similarity which is already known to us. Rather, such an interpretation should show what is added to our comprehension of morality when we apply the rule operative in judgments of beauty to the morally good.

When we see beauty as a sensible presentation of this supersensible object, four “aspects” of reflection on both are explicated in the text (§59 5:353–4): Beauty pleases (1) immediately and (2) without any interest; (3) there is a freedom in accord with lawfulness; and (4) the judgment has universal validity Along with these aspects of the sensible presentation, there are four qualifications: (1) morality pleases in the *concept*, not in the intuition and (2) without *preceding* interest; (3) the freedom of the will (rather than the imagination) is in agreement with itself according to laws of reason (rather than the understanding); and (4) the judgment is universally valid through an objective (practical) concept, rather than a subjective principle. On a “compare and contrast” reading, these four similarities and differences are both the justification and the result of the claim of symbolism. On such a reading, the purpose of identifying the symbolism would be to explain why experiences of beauty can prepare the subject for moral development. This purpose is taken for granted in the secondary literature, although it is not clear why such similarities would lead to preparation for morality. One might just as easily say that the use of handmills prepares one to be ruled in a despotic state, since a handmill is a symbol of a despotic state.[[13]](#footnote-13)

These four features are mere aspects of the analogical relation of reflection on beauty and morality; Kant is making explicit judgment’s “double task”, constitutive of the process of symbolization, but not the import of symbolism. This “compare and contrast” reading often goes hand-in-hand with the judgment-centered view laid out in section 2, since both underemphasize the making-sensible aspect of symbolism, and take an analogy between judgments of beauty and morality to be exhaustive of the symbolism.

The above (section 3) explication of the solution to the Antinomy makes possible a more substantive reading.[[14]](#footnote-14) The “rule” here, which we apply analogously to the morally good, comes from the application of the concept of the supersensible in judgment to the object. In judgments of beauty, the manifold of representations are not unified under a single concept or rule. Such representations bear the *form* of purposive unity, without a determinate concept which unifies. In the “conspicuous absence”, as I have termed it, of a purpose, we experience our inability to cognize whatever is unifying these representations into a purposive form, and are pointed toward the concept of the supersensible. The supersensible is that which is absent in that it cannot be cognized, but effective in that it gives the representations a purposive form. This reveals that the supersensible concept grounds the judgment without determining it, through providing a purposive form.

Judgment, in its “double task” of symbolic representation, here with respect to beauty and morality, first applies this concept of the supersensible to the object of beauty, revealing a structure of judgment in which the grounding concept provides a purposive unity for which the rule is theoretically inaccessible. It then takes this structure and applies it analogously to the morally good, the object of practical reason. If we put the object of practical reason in the place of beauty in the rule of this reflection, we get a sensible presentation—a symbol—of the morally good. That is, we can think the morally good, an effect possible through freedom, according to the structure in which the grounding concept, freedom, provides a purposive unity without a theoretically accessible purpose. The four features discussed above are aspects of this analogical application of the rule, but the main import of the symbolism is that morality is given a sensible rendering, according to which it has the unity of purposive form without a theoretically-given purpose to provide such unity.

Kant’s explanation of the true import of the symbolism is what comes just prior to the explication of these structural similarities:

[The faculty of judgment] sees itself, both on account of this inner possibility in the subject as well as on account of the outer possibility of a nature that corresponds to it, as related to something in the subject itself and outside of it, which is neither nature nor freedom, but which is connected with the ground of the latter, namely the supersensible, in which the theoretical faculty is combined with the practical, in a mutual and unknown way, to form a unity. (§59 5:353)

This is clearly Kant’s explication of the symbolism: the theoretical and practical faculties form a unity. This is also clearly where Kant makes good on his promise in the introduction for a transition from nature (the domain of the theoretical reason) to freedom (the domain of practical reason), even if the connection cannot be known by us.

The question with respect to morality is not how moral actions are physically possible.[[15]](#footnote-15) The “morally good” that Kant has in mind here is not an object of sense, but is, first and foremost, a supersensible object determined by the moral law. When explicating the notion of the object of pure practical reason in the second *Critique*, Kant states that the determining ground of such an object is the moral law, and “the judgment whether or not something is an object of pure practical reason is quite independent of this comparison with our physical ability” (*KpV* 5:57–8). Beauty does not symbolize the sensible manifestation of morality in actions: Since these are already sensible, they need no sensible presentation. Rather, it symbolizes morality as supersensible.

The question with respect to morality is thus how the theoretical is *taken up* into the practical to be determined by it: How can we think this unknown unity by which the theoretical is determined by practical reason? Beauty symbolizes morality in this way: In beauty, there is a purposive form within that which is theoretically determined without a theoretically determinate purpose, indicating that this sensible object is purposively ordered by something transcendent. Just as the sensible, beautiful object is subordinated to and ordered by some higher purpose, the supersensible morally good is the subordination of all ends to the end of the moral law. Beauty symbolizes this in its sensible grounding of purposive form by the indeterminate concept of the supersensible, which points toward a transcendent supersensible. This demonstrates to us the purposiveness of the moral law, in that all things—our inclinations, theoretical cognition, and so on—are purposively subordinated to it. Beauty thus gives a sensible presentation of the morally good.

**Conclusion**

To ask how my moral causality can “fit into” nature is to get the question upside-down, it is to approach questions of morality from the side of nature. Rather, the question should be: how does nature conform to my moral causality? According to Kant’s Critical strictures, this question cannot be given a determinate answer, and yet, beauty provides a symbol by which we can think an answer to this question. Namely, beauty demonstrates that nature can exhibit a purposive form which is itself grounded in the supersensible, and thus symbolizes morality’s purposive determination of everything, including nature. In other words, we see nature conform to that which transcends it. It is in this purposive form’s transcendent purpose that we see a sensible manifestation of morality’s supersensible determination of nature. This explains why beauty makes us feel at home in nature, because nature is subject to determination by practical reason. This prepares us to be moral not because of mere similarities in the structure of judgment; the preparation is in experiencing, through beauty, nature’s openness to transcendence, and the ennoblement of the human being as themselves transcending determination by inclinations, capable of ordering their lives purposively toward the moral law.[[16]](#footnote-16)

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1. E.g., Guyer (1993), see especially 314–8. Guyer freely switches between language of analogy and symbol, despite Kant’s careful disambiguation, and sees the similarities between the judgments as the locus and justification of the claim. See also Munzel (1995): “Through the analogy we comprehend that producing character in ourselves is like the production of the artwork through a causality in accordance with ideas” (326). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Recki (2008), see especially 196, gives a good treatment of these issues, both with respect to attention to the *Versinnlichung* provided by a symbol, as well as the asymmetry issue which arises when focusing merely on the form of judgment. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. On the other hand, one might adopt the view that it is the grounding of judgments in the concept of the supersensible —the solution to the Antinomy discussed below—that effects a transition, and symbolism has nothing to do with it. However, this is inadequate as an interpretation, since the transition is not merely from the sensible to an indeterminate supersensible, but from nature to *freedom*, and thus it is also a transition from the theoretical to the practical. The solution to the Antinomy does not invoke the practical at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. There is also no justification for this asymmetry on practical grounds, since in addition to beauty preparing us for moral cultivation (Introduction 5:197; §83 5:433), it is also the case that cultivation of moral ideas is the propaedeutic for taste (§60, 5:356). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Allison (2001): 254–63 is a strong example of this view. See also Savile (1987): 168–77. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This view is supported by Kant’s first remarks in §59, which mention symbolic intuitive presentation of concepts, and especially supersensible concepts, e.g., symbolic presentation of God in works of art or the handmill as a symbol of the despotic state; both examples have been discussed extensively in the literature. See, e.g., Cohen (1982): 233–236. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. C.f. *KpV*, 5:57–8; the object of practical reason is “an effect possible through freedom”. This effect is the object of practical reason; Kant highlights that the “possibility” here is not physical, but moral; the object of practical reason is, in this way, supersensible. This language is also appears in the Introduction: the determination of the sensible by the supersensible “is already contained in the concept of a causality through freedom, whose **effect** in accordance with its formal laws is to take place in the world” (5:195). Allison (2001: 207) points out that Kant’s question here concerns the compatibility not of the *noumenal* object of freedom with the *phenomenal* world of nature, but rather with the compatibility within appearances of the laws of nature with the sensible result, which is grounded by the object of practical reason. Allison thereby construes this transition as an “empirical-anthropological” issue; in this we disagree. Although Kant is concerned about the compatibility in appearances, the concern focuses on the coherence of two independent orders of law—the moral and those of the understanding—governing one domain. This is not an issue which could be resolved empirically, since it concerns the overdetermination of a single domain by two sets of necessary laws. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Kant’s language on the supersensible is consistent here: ‘in us’ is freedom, ‘outside us’ is the ground of nature, and is related to God. See Introduction 5:196, §57 5:345, §82 5:429, §91 5:474. C.f. also Zöller (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Their confusion has led some to claim that morality is the ground of the universal validity of judgments of taste, which has some support in the text, when Kant claims that “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and also that only in this respect (that of a relation that is natural to everyone, and that is also expected of everyone else as a duty) does it please with a claim to the assent of everyone else.” (5:353). However, read precisely, the passage does not imply this. Rather, that in virtue of which the beautiful is a symbol of morality—its relation to the concept of the supersensible—does it pleases with a claim to universal assent. This is in line with the interpretation I advance here. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Chignell (2007) for a discussion of these issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The appeal to the morality in this section has, in the past, been seen as that which grounds the universal validity of judgments of taste. See, e.g., Crawford (1974): 153. Such an interpretation no longer has many adherents. Guyer claims that this is to get the order of explanation wrong, since Kant would undoubtedly regard his deduction and resolution to the Antinomy as successful, and in need of no supplementation (1993: 18–19). Rather, Kant “looked to aesthetics to solve what he had come to recognize as crucial problems *for morality*” (19), namely, there is a disconnect between our sensible nature and moral freedom. Compare also Allison (2001): 266–7. I am in agreement with Guyer and Allison. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In this I differ from Allison (2001), who interprets aesthetic judgment’s contribution to the purposiveness of nature in terms of the beauty of natural objects, which might cultivate human receptivity to moral feeling. According to my interpretation here, aesthetic judgment demonstrates the purposiveness of nature *as such*, i.e., the possibility of its determination by ends which we cannot theoretically cognize. See especially pp. 213–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. C.f. §59 5:352. Of course, one can give *further* reasons why beauty might prepare one for morality. In that case, however, it is unclear what work the symbolism is doing. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Recki (2008): 201–8 also offers a more substantive interpretation of a different kind, focused more exclusively on freedom. She nevertheless thinks of the transition and the symbolism as aligned in a strict binary, with beauty/the sensible/nature symbolizing morality/the supersensible, with freedom providing the substantive link between them. See, e.g., 202: “Der Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Analogieformel liegt darin, daß sich schon die Erörterung des ästhetischen Urteils wie ein *Traktat auf die Idee der Freiheit* ausnimmt.” Here I argue that it is in the particular manner in which beauty relates the sensible to the supersensible, showing nature to be grounded in something that transcends it, that it symbolizes morality; Recki locates the symbolism primarily in the freedom of the imagination, which she takes to be of a kind with moral freedom, although realized in a different context (204). Zuckert (2007), see especially 377–82, offers an intuitive explanation of this view, as a “transition *within* the human subject” (377). I do not take these readings to be incompatible with the one I advance here, although in focusing exclusively on the free activity of the *subject*, both Recki and Zuckert are putting to the side the manner in which that freedom is subject to a lawfulness in both cases, and in aesthetic judgment requires an appeal to the supersensible, as that which transcends nature and the free play of the imagination. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In this I differ from Allison (2001); see footnote 5 for a full discussion of his interpretation, according to which these questions are empirical. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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