



BOOK REVIEW

Kristi Sweet, *Kant on Freedom, Nature, and Judgment: The Territory of the Third Critique* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023 Pp. x + 238 ISBN 9781316511121 (hbk), US \$99.99

Kristi Sweet’s new book contends that the ‘orienting question’ of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* is ‘What may I hope?’ (pp. 1-2). In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant says the three questions ‘What can I know?’ ‘What should I do?’, and ‘What may I hope’ exhaust all the ‘interests’ of speculative and practical reason (A805/B833). Kant’s correspondence, the transcripts of his lectures on metaphysics and anthropology, and the *Jäsche Logic* all say the question ‘What can I know?’ is answered by metaphysics, while the question ‘What should I do?’ is answered by morals, and the question ‘What may I hope?’ is answered by religion (9: 25; 11: 414; 25: 1198; 28: 533-44). Sweet’s claim that the answer to the question ‘What may I hope?’ is to be found in the power of judgment, and, specifically, in reflective judgment, is, therefore, hermeneutically bold. It asks us to look for hope in a different place (reflective judgment) than the one to which Kant directs us (religion).

Sweet makes the case that hope is the ‘interpretative master key’ to the *Critique of Judgment* across seven chapters. The first two chapters (1: Reason, Hope, and Territory; 2: Reflection, Purposiveness, Metaphysics) are framing chapters. They identify the problem that Sweet takes the third *Critique* to solve and outline her solution. Central to Sweet’s approach to the third *Critique* is the idea that Kant regards nature and freedom as limited domains within the larger territory of judgment; that reflective judgment extends beyond the limited domains of nature and freedom; and that, insofar as it extends beyond these two domains, reflective judgment provides us with a larger and more comprehensive perspective that we can use to mediate between nature and freedom. The next three chapters (3: ‘Life’ and the Ideal of Beauty; 4: The *Sensus Communis* and the Ground of the Critical System; 5: Genius, Aesthetic Ideas, and a Spiritualized Natural Order) focus on more specific issues in the Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment. Sweet argues that freedom is, in fact, an aesthetic idea, which explains why the human form is the ideal of beauty; that the *sensus communis* is the ground of all universality, including the universality of cognitive and moral judgments; and that genius spiritualises nature through beautiful art. Following an interlude (Transition to the Critique of Teleological Judgment) that explains the difference between the subjective purposiveness of aesthetic judgment and the objective purposiveness of teleological judgment, the last two chapters (6: The Domain of Nature as a System: Ends; 7: Hope and Faith: God in the Critique of Teleological Judgment) adopt a similar approach to the Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment. Sweet argues that the purposiveness of nature in Kant’s teleology gives us reason to hope that nature can accommodate our moral vocation, while faith in God as the author of nature makes it possible for us to believe that the highest good can be achieved in the world. In all of these chapters, Sweet returns to the claim that

reflective judgment sustains hope by calling our attention to something beyond nature and freedom, a larger territory that encompasses both domains, but which is not bound by their rules.

I am sure Sweet's approach to the third *Critique* will appeal to many readers, who will appreciate the originality of her interpretations, the way she uses reflective judgment to break free of the strictures of Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy, and her hope that human freedom can be efficacious in an accommodating world. However, I would like to take the opportunity of this review to raise some critical questions about Sweet's interpretations, particularly her account of reflective judgment, the role she thinks *sensus communis* plays in cognitive and moral judgment, and the object of Kantian hope. Raising these questions will also help to present aspects of Sweet's interpretations of the third *Critique* in more detail.

In Chapter 1, Sweet argues that nature and freedom are limited domains in which judgment possesses legislative authority (pp. 40-43). She regards the power of judgment as a larger territory in which these domains are situated. Judgments made 'out in the territory', beyond the domains of nature and freedom, lack legislative authority and cannot determine their objects in the way that cognitive and moral judgments do (pp. 43-48). In Chapter 2, Sweet maintains that the judgments appropriate to this larger territory are reflective, because they seek to discern the concepts and categories that we can use to cognise the things we encounter in the world (pp. 62-67). Although they fail to find any such concept, Sweet maintains that reflective judgment reveals the 'prior fittingness' or 'accord' between the mind and the world that makes cognition possible in general and, with it, the ground of cognitive and moral judgments (pp. 70-76). I think Sweet is wrong to suggest that cognitive and moral judgments are grounded in the power of judgment, since they derive their principles from the understanding (cognitive judgments) and reason (moral judgments). I also think it is a mistake to characterise reflective judgments as failed cognitive judgments (p. 66), since reflective judgments in the third *Critique* are not meant to discern *which* concept or category we should use to determine an object, but *how* to judge in the absence of such a concept. When 'only the particular is given', and we lack a 'universal' concept under which to subsume it, Kant says the reflecting power of judgment adopts 'a transcendental principle as a law', even though, in doing so, 'this faculty thereby gives a law only to itself, and not to nature' (5: 180). This means that the *a priori* principle to which reflective judgment appeals, the principle of purposiveness, refers only to the reflecting power of judgment and not to the domains of nature or freedom as Sweet suggests (pp. 3-4, 61). If that is true, then the territory of judgment would seem to be quite constrained, since its principle would only be subjectively valid, and, even then, it could only be used in cases where no other concept or category could serve as a principle. Employing the geopolitical metaphors that Sweet highlights in Kant, we might say that the domains of nature and freedom have occupied most of the territory, leaving only a small margin outside their jurisdiction.

In Chapter 3, Sweet daringly asserts that the *sensus communis* is the ground of all universality, including the universality of cognitive and moral judgments (pp. 7, 105, 123-30). There is no denying that the *sensus communis* plays an important role in reflective judgments of taste, which possess subjective necessity and demand others' assent by appealing to a shared 'mental state', that is, a similar 'disposition of the

cognitive powers' (5: 238). The *sensus communis* also plays an important role in the Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments, where taste itself is said to be a kind of 'communal sense [...] that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole' (5: 293). Sweet goes much farther, however, than these modest appeals to the *sensus communis*. Based on a passage from the third *Critique* that says 'cognitions and judgments must, together with the conviction that accompanies them, be able to be universally communicated, for otherwise they would have no correspondence with the object', she argues that the communicability is the fundamental condition of a judgment's truth and that agreement with the *sensus communis* is the most basic requirement for communicability (5: 238). Sweet supports this claim by referring to a passage from the Canon of Pure Reason in the first *Critique*, where Kant says the possibility of communicating a judgment is the touchstone of its truth. Sweet takes this as evidence that 'communicability as such' is sufficient proof of the validity of cognitive and moral judgments (p. 123, quoted in full at pp. 200-3). She holds that the ultimate ground of all judgment is the *sensus communis* that all human beings share – as a matter of 'fact' (pp. 109-110). It would be surprising if Kant held this view, since he is sceptical about appeals to the *sensus communis* in the *Anthropology* (see, e.g., 7: 145) and treats common-sense philosophy quite dismissively in the first *Critique* (see Ax, A855/B883) and the *Prolegomena* (see 4: 259-60). I think the problem with Sweet's interpretation begins with the passage from the Canon of Pure Reason, where she fails to notice that Kant says the communicability of a judgment is only the 'external' touchstone of its truth, which ultimately depends on a judgment's agreement with 'objective grounds' (A820/B8480). This allows Kant to distinguish the universal communicability of objectively valid 'conviction' (*Überzeugung*) from 'persuasion' (*Überredung*), since the latter relies on the 'semblance' of objectivity that we give to judgments resting on merely 'subjective' grounds that possess 'only private validity' (A820/B848). So, instead of asserting that communicability is sufficient proof of the truth of a judgment, as Sweet suggests, Kant is actually saying that judgments are only communicable when they correspond to 'the object [...] through which the truth of the judgment is proved' (A821/B849). If Kant's views on 'conviction' are consistent in the first *Critique* and the third *Critique*, then the passage that grounds Sweet's interpretation should be read opposite to the way she takes it: correspondence with the object is the ground of the universal communicability of cognitive judgments, and the objectivity of a judgment does not depend on its agreement with the common sense of the subject. Kant's appeal to the *sensus communis* in the third *Critique* indicates that at least some subjective claims are universally communicable and might even possess a certain normative force, through which others' assent could be expected, without resorting to manipulative persuasion. Still, I worry about the anthropocentrism of Sweet's attempt to ground not only judgments of taste but cognitive and moral judgments, and indeed, the whole of Kant's Critical philosophy on the *sensus communis* as a 'fact' of human nature. If the *sensus communis* were really the ultimate ground of all judgment, as Sweet claims, then the universality and necessity of cognitive and moral judgments would be relative and conditional because they would only hold for a particular species of terrestrial rational beings (human beings) and not for rational beings in general, including those

non- and extra-terrestrial rational beings (God, angels, aliens, etc.) about whom Kant is also concerned.

This brings us to a final set of questions about religion and the object of Kantian hope. Sweet's interpretation of the third *Critique* suggests that hope gives us reason to believe that freedom can be 'efficacious' in nature (p. 1) and that the natural world can be reconceived in a way that is 'more hospitable to the ends of human freedom than that of the first *Critique*' (p. 5). In Chapter 7, she argues that faith in God as the author of nature justifies our belief that the highest good can be achieved in the world, leading to the creation of a 'moral world' that Sweet identifies as 'a free federation of states with republican constitutions, guaranteed cosmopolitan right, and human beings actively participating in ethical communities' (p. 197). Yet when we look to Kant's writings on religion, where he says the question 'What may I hope?' is answered, we see that Kant does not think hope concerns the efficaciousness of freedom in nature, the degree to which nature is hospitable to humanity, or the possibility that we can realise the highest good in this world through politics, law, or government. Instead, the hope that Kant advocates in *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* is the hope that we can eliminate the corruption in human nature that prevents us from being the purely rational, moral beings we are called to be (6: 44-52). The vocation of humanity involves hope for a transformation of human nature, for us to become what we ought to be, rather than a hope that the world will be more accommodating to us as we are. Here, I think Sweet underestimates the radicalism of Kantian hope, which extends beyond this life and this world, both of which turn out to be rather parochial concerns for rational moral beings – at least for Kant.

Despite these concerns, I would recommend *Kant on Freedom, Nature, and Judgment* to anyone interested in Kant's third *Critique*. Placing Sweet's interpretation in dialogue with another recent work on the third *Critique* and the unity of Kant's critical philosophy, Lara Ostaric's *The Critique of Judgment and the Unity of Kant's Critical System* (Cambridge University Press, 2023) would be especially illuminating.

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