



## AUTHOR MEETS CRITICS

# Beyond Notes on a Napkin: A Précis of *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics* and Replies to My Critics

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According to Kant's marginalia and student lecture notes, he liked to quote the following saying, which he attributed to Aristotle: 'My Friends, there are no Friends'. I would like to say of all three of my respondents: 'My Critics, there are no Critics'. For, to modify an old saw, with critics like these, who needs academic friends?

I thank my three respondents Jessica Williams, Melissa Zinkin, and Colin McQuillan, for crafting such judicious remarks and being so charitable in their thought-provoking comments. I am pleased that their topics synchronize well. Williams addresses the core issue of aesthetic normativity and insists on the centrality of 'a priori sociality' in Kant's 1790 aesthetics. Zinkin explores humour and wit in connection with reflection and aesthetic judgement, and she wonders whether Kant could claim that humour production is an art of the beautiful. And McQuillan focuses on Kant's conception of the 'aesthetic' in relation to Kant's so-called rationalist predecessors such as Baumgarten and Meier.<sup>1</sup> That each author is working on these respective areas is evident from the quality and rigour of their remarks. I begin with a *précis* of the book and then turn to their comments.

### 1. *Précis of The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*

The Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgement in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement* is widely recognized as one of the most important contributions to aesthetic theory. By paying particular attention to his early writings, unpublished notes, correspondence, and university lectures, *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics* (Clewis 2023; generally cited herein simply by page number) explores the development and sources of the aesthetic theory Kant defends in his work of 1790. Each of the eight chapters is devoted to a theme that I took to be of interest to scholars in aesthetics and Kant studies today: aesthetic normativity (chapter 1), free beauty (chapter 2), adherent beauty (chapter 3), genius or creativity (chapter 4), the fine arts (chapter 5), sublimity (chapter 6), ugliness and disgust (chapter 7), and humour (chapter 8).

The time was right for such an exploration, given the publication of Kant's anthropology lectures in 1997, which had not yet been mined for what they say about Kant's aesthetics. Kant lectured for 23 years on anthropology, from winter semester 1772–73 until his retirement in 1796. His lectures on anthropology were his most popular academic offering in terms of attendance, interest, and accessibility. The well-edited publication of the lectures in *Akademie-Ausgabe's* volume 25 advanced the state of the art, gathering seven lectures, many of which had revealing things to say about aesthetics: Collins (1772–73); Parow (1772–73); Friedländer (1775–76); Pillau (1777–78); *Menschenkunde* (1781–82); *Mrongovius* (1784–85); and Busolt (1788–89). The appearance of such materials allows us to update major studies by Menzer (in German, 1952) and Zammito (1992).

These student notes are an important resource for my book, since many of Kant's ideas on aesthetics are present in such lecture notes. Since Kant never published works on aesthetics between 1764 and 1790, the lecture notes (among other early sources) are a key resource for charting and understanding the development of his aesthetics, and therefore for helping us have a better and more nuanced interpretation of the views articulated in the third *Critique*. Of course, since the lecture notes are not verbatim transcripts of Kant's lectures, if they were to provide authentic insight into Kant's views, they had to be read in light of his early published works, *Reflexionen* or literary remains, and correspondence.

Each chapter is devoted to one of those eight topics. But why these eight? I selected themes that meet three criteria as much as possible. *Relevance to aesthetics*: 1) The topic is of general interest to scholars in fields where aesthetic ideas are central (e.g. literary studies, film studies, art history, the arts). For instance, although the following topics are mentioned in my book, I do not devote entire chapters to Kant's 'principle of purposiveness' or his view of vital forces, since few to no contemporary scholars appeal to such concepts in proposing theories today. 2) *Philosophical significance*: Kant's account of the theme would be deemed to be of sufficient intellectual and philosophical import to experts in aesthetics and allied fields. Thus, while Kant's theory of physiognomy and its relation to Lavater may be of considerable historical interest, his account of physiognomy would not be examined, unless, say, it related to his philosophical theory of human beauty. 3) *Influence*: Finally, Kant's account has been appropriated by successors in aesthetics and related disciplines and has played an influential role in the history of aesthetics. In other words, these are some of the core topics for which Kant is known and the reason why he is discussed in aesthetic theory (whether criticized or defended): beauty, sublimity, genius, normativity, humour, etc. (Kant's conception of 'aesthetics' will be taken up by Colin McQuillan below.)

Although there was inevitably some variation, the structure of each chapter was typically a version of the following. I first summarized the general account Kant defended in the third *Critique*, without wading into the controversies too much. I then characterized the debate or context among Kant's predecessors and sources, while showing what was at stake in the debate. I next stated the development of Kant's views by examining the lectures, correspondence, marginalia, and published writings that preceded the third *Critique*. I revisited the third *Critique* in light of the above, revealing what views developed or remained the same. In identifying the latter developments, I explained any change or retention in terms of five 'arcs': the shifts of

emphasis (1) from art to nature; (2) from intellectual or conceptual beauty to free beauty; (3) from aesthetic perfection to aesthetic ideas; (4) from laws of intuition to free play; and (5) from understanding aesthetic experience as primarily a cognitive activity (even if a free one) without any further connection to moral freedom, to interpreting aesthetic experience, as a mode of freedom, in terms of its ethical significance: the moral turn.

The book is divided into three Parts: 'Aesthetic Judgment and Beauty'; 'Genius and the Fine Arts'; and 'Negative and Positive States' (in which I look at negative, positive, and mixed emotions or affective states).

In the first chapter, I lay the basis for later discussion by looking at Kant's grounding of aesthetic normativity in the early phases of his development. I thus formulate what I call his principle of sensible comprehension. Since it is discussed by my respondents, I will state it again here:

*Principle of sensible comprehension:* The beautiful facilitates sensible comprehension according to the laws of intuitive cognition or sensibility. (p. 33)

Kant mostly inherits this principle from the German 'rationalist' aesthetic tradition, though, as Colin McQuillan points out, I could have been clearer about how Kant's understanding of sensibility (as givenness) differs from sensibility as understood by his predecessors (confused cognition). Even if our sensible capacities are supposed by Kant to work in the same way, any rules that are to be offered by the use of such sensible capacities would be merely empirical.

In this chapter, I also survey philosophers from the British tradition, which I see as the source of what I called Kant's empirical, consensus-based view of normativity: the normativity of aesthetic judgements is grounded in, or finds its source in, the consensus over time about successful, 'canonical' works. This raises the question of the role of sociality in judgements of taste in Kant's early and mature aesthetics, a theme taken up by Jessica Williams.

Given the prominence of form for the principle of sensible comprehension, I next grapple with the difficult and controversial subject of Kant's formalism(s), which in the early period seems to be based on such a principle of sensible comprehension. I argue in Chapter 2 that Kant is clearly a formalist of *some* kind (in light of, at the very least, the frequent uses of the term). But if so, what kind of formalist is he? I suggest that there is more than one kind of formalism in Kant's thought. There are strong, moderate, and weak versions. Moreover, this is true in both the early and late periods. This chapter thus emphasizes some of the discontinuities within both Kant's thought over time and even in the third *Critique* itself.

The third chapter then turns to the counterpart to free beauty in Kant's aesthetics: adherent beauty. It can go by various names: dependent, ancillary, or even intellectual, conceptual, and purpose-based. One fundamental issue here is: what is the relation between the beautiful and the good? The good is conceived, for Kant, under a concept and thus as determinable and, in his later moral philosophy, as determined in particular by the moral law. Here one can compare Kant's account to those of predecessors such as Sulzer and Hume. Like them, Kant distinguishes between free beauty and purpose-based beauty, or the kind grounded in the aims of the object or artwork. Even in his early aesthetics, Kant holds (in various ways) that

beauty and goodness are distinct concepts but, in my view, he also holds that they can be conjoined. The concept of 'purpose-based beauty' is central to Kant's early aesthetics, and in many lectures and fragments he calls this kind of beauty 'self-standing'. Purpose-based beauty, I submit, does not just disappear in Kant's later aesthetics, but is retained in the third *Critique* in the form of *adherent* beauty. But here a truly remarkable shift occurs: it is now *free* beauty that is deemed 'self-standing'. A key question is why this shift occurs.

Chapter 4, the first chapter in Part II, explores Kant's theory of genius. Kant lectured and wrote about genius even before he read Gerard's *Essay on Genius* around 1776, for he had already been thinking about Plato, Edward Young, Rousseau, and Herder. Still, Gerard's *Essay on Genius* had a profound effect on Kant's conception of genius.

I avoid the widely discussed question about whether and why Kant denied that scientific activity requires genius, since it is not so relevant to aesthetics per se and thus to my book. I am instead interested in the question of the relation between taste and genius, and if one is a component of the other. To put it another way, can genius produce original nonsense, so that genius need not contain taste, but rather needs taste to come in and impose constraints on it (see also Anth, 2: 241)? Or, as Kant sometimes writes in the third *Critique*, is taste instead a necessary component of genius itself? Taking up terms found in classical German scholarship (Otto Schlapp) as well as recent anglophone scholarship (Henry Allison), I agree that in the third *Critique* Kant employs two very different conceptions of genius, the 'thick' and the 'thin'. Both conceptions can be found in Kant's early thoughts about genius. But this means that when the two notions are retained in the third *Critique*, internal tensions emerge. Here, I end up stressing the discontinuities and tensions in Kant's thought and work.

The concept of genius as a producer of fine art naturally leads to the topic of the fine arts. So the fifth chapter examines Kant's 'modern' theory of the fine arts with reference to his predecessors, in particular, Batteux and Wolff. The notes and fragments show that Kant experimented with several different classificatory themes over the years. It is not as if Kant systematically held to one definition or schema of the fine arts.

I thus portray Kant's various classifications. Starting in the mid 1770s, meanwhile, Kant conceives of aesthetic experience of the fine arts as evoking a free play between imagination and the understanding (very much along the lines presented in the third *Critique*). Around this time, he also distinguishes the fine arts from handicraft. Finally, he views the fine arts as products of genius and spirit that express and exhibit aesthetic ideas (again as in the third *Critique*).

Interesting here, if this is correct, is that the core theories of a free play (*between* imagination and understanding, and not a play of imagination alone) and of aesthetic ideas seem to emerge around the same time, that is, the mid 1770s. This is noteworthy because in the literature the two notions (free play, aesthetic ideas) are sometimes placed in opposition to each other, and for two reasons: the free play looks like it matches up better with *free* (pure) beauty, whereas aesthetic ideas seem to match up with the beauty of *art* (widely interpreted as an *adherent* beauty). Second, free beauty is often seen as being part of a reception aesthetic, and aesthetic ideas part of a production aesthetic. Though I did not argue this in the book, perhaps such coeval

emergence of free harmony and aesthetic ideas calls into question these two widely shared assumptions (free play's associations with free rather than adherent beauty; aesthetic ideas as mainly concerning production rather than reception aesthetics).

In the third Part of the book, I examine the sublime, ugliness and disgust, and laughter at humour. I conceive of the sublime as a *mixed* state, ugliness as a *negative* state (i.e. as disagreeable), and humour as an overall *positive* state. Chapter 6 thus characterizes the development of Kant's views of the sublime in his publications such as *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) as well as other pre-Critical writings and materials. The inclusion of the sublime in the third *Critique* is significantly affected by Kant's moral turn, I suggest, here largely following the broad theses (if not all the details) offered by Paul Guyer and John Zammito. This is not to say Kant did not discuss the sublime in early works, lectures, and fragments. He certainly did, though it could not yet be linked to his theory of morality and reason until he had developed those, presumably after the Inaugural Dissertation (1770) and indeed closer to the *Groundwork* (1785). Kant writes about what we would consider the sublime in his earlier works of natural philosophy such as *Universal Natural History* and the 'Only Possible Proof'.<sup>2</sup> But he does so largely in a theological context. He sees the sublime as closely linked to God's perfection, rather than as being closely connected, even analytically tied, to reason.

In line with a typical chapter's method, I look at Kant's antecedents such as Burke as well as Baumgarten and Mendelssohn. I show that the early Kant synthesizes the ideas of British empiricism on the one hand and of German rationalism on the other, as well as that Kant's view of the sublime changes from a psychological-anthropological (and theological) account to a non-empirical, transcendental (and reason-based) account.

The seventh chapter explores ugliness and disgust (*Ekel*). But here a difficult question arises: Does Kant think there are pure aesthetic judgements of ugliness? Rather than just (per my usual method) 'summarizing' the third *Critique* position here, I acknowledge that the existence of pure aesthetic judgements of the ugly is widely disputed in the literature. Still, after surveying this literature, I suggest that there are good arguments for concluding that, within the Kantian framework, there cannot be any pure aesthetic judgements of the ugly. In his early accounts, as well, Kant views the responses to ugliness and disgust as unpleasant and therefore as *interested* (in Kant's sense of the term). He typically discusses ugliness and disgust in connection with a teleological perspective of the whole of nature and natural purposes. The ugly is disagreeable, since it is dysfunctional or asymmetrical (or both). A version of this carries over into the third *Critique*. The ugly, if and when it is judged by the principle of nature's purposiveness (the principle of the power of judgement), would be contrapurposive and therefore disagreeable.

Kant completes the 'Analytic of the Beautiful' by offering remarks on laughter (§54). In similar fashion, I conclude the book with a chapter on humour, a topic overlooked, with a few exceptions, by Kant's interpreters in recent decades. I am pleased that Melissa Zinkin explores this topic.

I aim to show that Kant's thoughts on humour can be viewed as part of his aesthetics. Specifically, his view of laughter at humour can be interpreted in terms of his notion of a 'free play' of the mental powers of imagination and understanding. I thus explore the sources of his account of humour in authors such as Butler, Swift,

Fielding, Sterne, Shaftesbury, and Voltaire, and show how Kant's thoughts about humour developed. I explain why, at least on the surface, he appears to think that creating humour is only an agreeable art rather than a fine art, that is, an art of the beautiful. Kant combines elements of the incongruity, superiority, and release theories that had preceded him. To this, he adds his thoughts about a free play between imagination and understanding. So, once Kant began to understand aesthetic responses generally in terms of a free play, it put him in a position to think about laughter at humour as an instance of such play. This connected humour to his wider aesthetic theory.

In the book's Concluding Reflections, I offer three final points. Consistent with my view of Kant's work (and of writing in general!), I don't offer this Reflection as a grand conclusion. The first point, indeed, is that Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement* is full of inner tensions, and they can in part be traced back to Kant's working through various sources and to his drawing from different aspects of his earlier views. He engaged with many previous and contemporary writers and, as my five arcs charted, his thoughts developed over decades of consideration of issues in aesthetics. Now that more textual resources have become available and/or more accessible to Kant's readers, that trajectory has become even more visible, and in the book I hope to have depicted it accurately. The great work of 1790 is not *all* patchwork, but it certainly contains some internal conflicts. Consider how the third *Critique* treats the notion of form and thus seems to have different kinds of formalisms. Think of how Kant handles the notion of genius – the thick and the thin. Or look at Kant's attempts to classify the fine arts in various ways within the same book, and not just over time – which he also does.

But the second point is more positive: Kant's attempt to solve a given aesthetic problem, despite the risk of failure, can still be instructive. Kant's *early* aesthetics may have more to offer than scholars and commentators realize. Why is that? As readers of the book will have noticed, I think its potential arises because there are philosophically attractive ideas in eighteenth-century Scottish-Irish-English aesthetics and in German rationalist aesthetics – the main traditions that Kant synthesizes in his early aesthetics. Perhaps critics of Kant's transcendental philosophy would be interested in learning more about this different Kant. I submit, accordingly, that it is acceptable to see the philosopher from Königsberg as more than the author of the critical or transcendental works, even if the latter surely is, and will be, the intellectual legacy for which he will be best remembered. So, perhaps there is still value to some of his early ideas and arguments. In particular, the empirical, consensus-based approach of the early aesthetics (chapter 1) might attract those who want to renounce the idea of strict universality in aesthetics while still having some guidelines in matters of taste – though I did not defend such a position in the book. Or, turning to music, perhaps one could apply, in a non-universalistic direction, Kant's view that music arouses a moving play of thoughts or emotions rather than elicits 'pure' judgements of taste that are alleged or supposed to have universal validity.

In any case, the 1790 account informs many current discussions in the philosophy of art and art criticism. As Kant himself noticed (at the end of §16), the distinction between free and partly conceptual beauty might be able to help resolve some disputes in taste and guide art criticism (chapter 3). Kant's ideas about genius are favourably invoked in creativity studies (chapter 4), and his views of the sublime

continue to inspire theories today (chapter 6). In the growing field of humour studies, Kant is seen as a leading incongruity theorist, even if he was preceded by Hutcheson and Mendelssohn (chapter 8). And now, in light of Jessica Williams's comments below, I can note that his theory of a norm of aesthetic common sense might be useful to those working out communitarian theories of beauty and aesthetic value.

I conclude the book, somewhat dialectically, with a negative point. Not all of Kant's ideas, whether early or late, can be applied so readily. Though some research on art and beauty in empirical aesthetics might use a bottom-up approach that is allied with a version of Kantian formalism, it is difficult to defend narrow formalism in contemporary criticism and theory of art. Moreover, the conception of art or what counts as 'fine art' has also moved far beyond Kant's restrictive framework. His view of painting and the visual arts is limited by eighteenth-century notions that art must represent nature and that it must do so in a beautiful way. This mimetic and pro-beauty view of art (interrogated for decades by Arthur Danto) likewise constrains Kant's account of the sublime. Only if it is radically updated could a Kantian account of the sublime be applied to Barnett Newman paintings, Richard Serra sculptures, and the world's dazzling cityscapes at night. Finally, in light of contemporary art, where beauty is no longer necessary (again as Danto noted), Kant's choice to not develop a substantive aesthetic theory of *ugliness* seems to be out of sync with current theory, even if he may have had good, or at least coherent, reasons for his view that there are no pure or free aesthetic judgements of ugliness and even if his position follows from the twofold core of his aesthetic theory: the principle of the purposiveness of nature, and the theory of the free, harmonious mental play as an open-ended response to aesthetic ideas in art and nature. If by discussing humour in the final chapter I finished Part 3 on a positive note, I conclude the final remark, and thus the book, on a negative one.

## 2. Replies to comments

*Jessica Williams*

Williams challenges my narrative of the development of Kant's thinking about aesthetic normativity, mostly offered in the first chapter of *Origins*. As she puts it, 'Clewis' narrative of Kant's development obscures the fact that the sociality of aesthetic pleasure continues to be a core aspect of Kant's mature theory of aesthetic normativity'. What my story overlooks, she claims, is 'the way that sociality continues to function as a source of aesthetic normativity in the mature Kant'. She writes: 'Kant does not give up the view that aesthetic normativity is grounded in the sociality of aesthetic pleasure. Instead, he replaces an appeal to empirical sociality with an appeal to an a priori form of sociality that is grounded in shared human capacities'. This point 'is not only of interest to Kant interpreters', she suggests, 'but also to contemporary aestheticians who are exploring communitarian theories of aesthetic value'.<sup>3</sup> She holds that recognizing that part of the experience is its universal communicability or shareability 'is crucial for overcoming an individualist reading of the third *Critique*, which focuses solely on the individual as the locus of aesthetic experience and the source of aesthetic value. Kant is better read as a communitarian, that is, as someone who emphasizes that aesthetic life and aesthetic value are deeply social'.<sup>4</sup>



I begin with a brief comment on her claim that Kant replaces an appeal to empirical sociality with an appeal to an a priori form of sociality ‘grounded in shared human capacities’. If this claim implies that it is the *free play of the faculties* that grounds the state of mind’s capacity for communication (*Mitteilungsfähigkeit*) (§9) in the judgement of taste, I agree with it, though I admit that this is one of the most controversial and difficult topics in Kant’s aesthetics. While Kant writes that the *sensus communis* is a presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) of the judgement of taste (§20), in the same sentence he adds that ‘we’ understand that the *sensus communis* is the ‘effect’ of the free play (*die Wirkung aus dem freien Spiel*) (see also Wenzel 2005: 84). If the free play is the ground of such an ‘effect’, it would suggest that the a priori sociality should be located in, or associated with, first and foremost the free play of the faculties.

Williams maintains that Kant continued to retain some notion of the social dimension of taste, albeit in an a priori form. Pointing readers to §9 (5: 217), she adds:

In a footnote, Clewis briefly acknowledges that it is the *universal communicability* of our state of mind in the experience of beauty that is the ground of our pleasure in the object (and hence presumably also of the normativity of the judgement) (p. 43, fn. 39), but he more often refers only to the pleasure in the free harmony of the faculties (e.g. pp. 61, 122). There is, of course, a debate about which pleasure grounds a judgement of beauty: pleasure in the free play of the faculties (Guyer 1997: 139–40) or pleasure in the universal communicability of the pleasurable free play (Longuenesse 2006).<sup>5</sup>

I fear that settling this may require a deeper investigation of §9 than can or should be offered in the present response. Still, her interesting comments, with which I am in broad agreement, raise some questions: What is the precise distinction between empirical and a priori sociality, and what is the role of the *actual* judgement of others here (and does it risk sounding like *empirical* sociality)? And to what extent do we need to cultivate and develop our aesthetic judgement in order to make a judgement of taste at all?<sup>6</sup>

First, let me flag a general concern, then put it aside. I worry that in some of the scholarship there is a potential conflation of concepts that are *converses* of each other: ‘feeling of communion’ (Longuenesse), on the one hand, and a ‘community of feeling’ or ‘representatives of a shared humanity’ (Williams), on the other. Consider Williams’s invocation of the latter: ‘When we make judgements of taste, we take ourselves to belong to a community of judging subjects’. This latter idea seems unproblematic to me. But it is unclear to me that a community of shared feelings (or judging subjects) is, or requires, in the Kantian case being discussed, and *pace* readings by (or inspired by) Longuenesse and Ginsborg, a feeling of *communion* among the judges. I leave this issue aside since it would require us to wade into a closer investigation of §9.<sup>7</sup> But I mention it since Williams touches on how to interpret the passage (arguably an outlier and holdover from an early period) about universal communicability as the source of pleasure.<sup>8</sup>

Methodologically, I think we agree we need to be cautious, when looking to support a position about a priori sociality, in turning to *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), which discusses taste as social in both empirical and a priori



senses, without being entirely clear when there is a shift from the empirical to the a priori (7: 240, 241). Kant somewhat ambiguously writes, for instance: ‘Taste is, accordingly, a faculty of making *social* judgments of external objects within the power of imagination’ (7: 241; original emphasis). Likewise, we should be cautious when turning to §41 of the third *Critique* ([hereafter] KU, 5: 297), which concerns the empirical interest in beauty. In line with this, Williams indeed distinguishes an empirical from an a priori sociality precisely at that point in her comments.

So let me state the main concern: I do not think the distinction between the empirical and the a priori is as clear (or used as clearly) as it could be. Specifically, I worry that Williams’s appeal to an *actual* community of judges or judgements (or works) is too empirical, for I take her thesis (which I find broadly compelling) instead to concern a priori sociality. So I fear that an appeal to actual rather than possible judgements (see also Williams 2024) could detract from the strongest presentation of her view.<sup>9</sup>

A related issue concerns the role of cultivation. One of the ways Kant suggests that we develop and cultivate our taste is by responding to and appreciating works that have withstood the test of time, and by comparing our views or judgements with those of others, discussing the reasons for their views, explaining our responses, and so on.

Let us consider again what Kant says here. In §32, he raises a worry that praising ancient works of art ‘seems to indicate *a posteriori* sources of taste and to contradict the autonomy of taste in every subject’ (KU, 5: 282). He goes on to claim that ‘there is no use of our powers at all, however free it might be . . . which, if every subject had to begin entirely from the raw predisposition of his own nature, would not fall into *mistaken attempts* if others had not preceded him with their own’ (5: 283; my italics).

The first sentence seems to reflect Kant’s *rejection* of the consensus-based view of the aesthetic normativity of judgements of taste, consonant with the analysis proposed in *Origins*. (I believe that Williams would agree with this so far, for she writes: ‘Let me be clear. This is *not* the requirement to agree with the judgements of others.’) In the next quoted sentence, Kant seems to say, and in my view quite reasonably, that without comparison to other judgements (or works), the attempts would be ‘mistaken’. Now, mistaken is not the same as impossible. It is a failed judgement of taste, one that seems to be an inappropriate fit with the object or work. In §8, Kant suggests that we actually sometimes make an ‘erroneous judgment of taste’ (KU, 5: 216).<sup>10</sup> Not all judgements of taste, in other words, have benefited from formation and cultivation. Whether or not this is the case strikes me as more an empirical than an a priori matter.

So, I entirely agree with Williams that the judgements and views of other people are needed if we are to develop and improve our taste, employing (as she usefully discusses) even the maxims of common sense discussed in §40 (KU, 5: 295).<sup>11</sup> We might (let us suppose for the moment) still *be able* to make an aesthetic judgement without engaging with the actual judgements of others. But we would very likely not do it well. To improve and develop our abilities, we need the grindstone of other people’s views, just as Williams suggests. As Kant puts it in §40, we would need to think from the position of everyone else.

In short, I have focused on how to draw the distinction between the a priori and empirical sociality in a useful and still Kantian manner that is not dialectical (where

the distinction would be ultimately collapsed or *aufgehoben*), assuming, that is, that we should not read Kant that way. I agree that there is a fruitful and interesting ‘communitarian’ element in Kant’s position. I am just not sure we should locate empirical sociality at the heart of the judgement itself, rather than in education, formation, cultivation, and the aesthetic practices that make up the aesthetic life more generally.<sup>12</sup> Thankfully, I do not think we have to read Williams as claiming that we do, for I take her thesis to be about a priori sociality.

Melissa Zinkin

Zinkin explores several interesting connections between wit, reflective judgement, and humour. Through a discussion of the concept of ‘mother wit’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, she provides additional support for seeing a close connection between humour and judgements of beauty, and thus (potentially) for a non-physiological, non-mechanistic interpretation of humour in Kant’s writings. Here, pressing Kant further, she ponders the idea that ‘wit’, understood as ‘thinking up the universal for the particular’ and thus as (basically) reflective judgement, is fundamental to both humour and aesthetic judgement.

I find the first two sections of her response rich and stimulating and have no major disagreements with them. Still, a methodological question arises (indeed, the kind of question I grappled with in writing the book): To what extent can we import what the 1781 work says about ‘mother wit’ to better understand the 1790 theory of wit and judgement? The relationship between the views of judgement (etc.) in the first and the third *Critiques* has been well studied in the older German-language literature and more recent anglophone scholarship. For instance, scholars have debated the extent to which the regulative/constitutive distinction is a precursor to, or even nearly the same as, the reflective/determinative judgement distinction. Scholars likewise discuss the distinction between the (constitutive) apodictic use of reason (where a given universal is applied to a particular) and the (regulative) hypothetical use of reason in which a universal is assumed problematically (*problematisch*) as a way to unify particulars (A646-7/B674-5). The latter seems to be precisely what, according to the anthropology materials, *Witz* does.

In the remainder, however, I will turn to Zinkin’s discussion (in section 3) of humour as a potential art of the beautiful, and to the issue of whether the production of humour (joking, comedy) can be a fine art on Kantian grounds. In addition, I will also make two related points about humour’s connection to morality and examine whether a joke always has ‘closure’.

In order to explore whether, contrary to Kant’s stated view, a case can be made that humour production deserves to be called a beautiful art rather than an agreeable one (KU, 5: 332), a quick review is in order. Both fine (*schön*) and agreeable arts, as ‘aesthetic’ arts, involve a kind of pleasure. Agreeable arts *a fortiori* involve a pleasure of the agreeable; fine/beautiful (*schön*) arts evoke a pleasure that is based on the free play or harmony of the faculties. They aim to elicit pleasure via representations that are, or relate to, kinds of cognition (*Erkenntnisarten*), that is, by involving a free, harmonious play. Art that is agreeable instead aims to evoke pleasure through representations that are mere sensations.

Kant sees joking or the production of humour as an art of the agreeable, but it is not completely clear why he does so, nor if he is consistent in so doing.

The problem, Zinkin and I agree, is that Kant seems to be divided here. On the one hand, in light of the physiological and mechanistic aspects of our responses to humour, Kant focuses on the bodily effects of laughter (qua humour response) and on laughter as an affect (*Affekt*), in which one momentarily seems to have one's capacities for reason and judgement diminished (though presumably not to lose them outright).<sup>13</sup> Kant seems to think that this implies that humour production can be only an agreeable art. He thus places the 'arts of laughter' next to background music, gaming, and proper table setting (KU, 5: 305–6).

On the other hand, in a remarkable passage, Kant writes that we can 'judge' the 'harmonies' in 'sallies of wit', just as one can 'judge' the harmony in a beautiful object (KU, 5: 332), thereby evoking a harmony of the faculties, and possibly leading to a judgement (*Urteil*) on the basis of the judging activity. By virtue of being a 'play with aesthetic ideas or even representations of the understanding', a play that 'begins with thoughts' (5: 332), some instances of humour-making would then be able to be seen as intellectually rich and potentially as instances of fine art. In such a case, the pleasure would arise from a way of 'cognizing' (*Erkenntnisart*), that is, from a play of cognitions rather than of sensations.

Taking up this aspect of Kant's position, then, the joke or humorous content, like an object or event judged beautiful, would elicit a play with aesthetic ideas, that is, representations of the imagination, or intuitive content, that cannot be fully captured by concepts. This would then imply that it would sometimes be justified to see the (comic) artist as a Kantian 'genius', that is, a creative, original spirit (in Kant's sense) who gives life to the joke and thereby animates the faculties of the apprehenders in addition to enlivening the creator's own faculties.<sup>14</sup>

Zinkin provides an argument for why Kant considers humour to be an art of the agreeable rather than of the beautiful, writing at one point: 'What is motivating Kant's argument against humour is not that it is not the object of a universal satisfaction, but that it involves the body'.

She then goes on to *question* Kant's rejection of the link to the body, namely, his claim that the bodily pleasure, the particular kind of agreeableness in humour, vitiates the ability of humour production to qualify as an art of the beautiful. I here refer the reader to Zinkin's interesting paragraph beginning: 'However, in the case of humour, I would argue, the promotion of my health is not a kind of gratification that is particular just to me'.

I am not sure this is the route we should take and it seems to be a point where our approaches diverge. I also think Zinkin may have expected me to respond this way (see the first two paragraphs of her Section 3). For instance, she writes: 'In the case of humour, Kant seems to assume that because jokes gratify us by promoting our bodily health, my finding something to be funny cannot be required of everyone'.

In arguing for humour production as a fine art, I indeed prefer to suggest that Kant should embrace the *imaginative-intellectualist*<sup>15</sup> aspects of humour. Zinkin wishes us to consider and employ (in a Kantian account) the physiological, physical aspects associated with the body. But, in light of such gratification's being interested and thus a contingent fact which may obtain in the case of some individuals but not others, I doubt that this reasoning could proceed consistently within the Kantian framework and lead to the attribution of genuine universality to the humour response.

Here a comparison to a bodily massage, which Kant discusses in the ‘General Remark’ on the exposition of aesthetic reflective judgements, is instructive (KU, 5: 273-4). Would Zinkin say that a massage is (to use her terms) ‘interested’ yet ‘promotes bodily health’? Surely that is the case. It is interested in the Kantian sense, bringing a pleasure of the agreeable and evoking our desire for the massage (not just its representation) to continue. We desire the existence of the object (the massage) until we are completely satisfied. And, if executed properly, it clearly promotes bodily health.

But is the pleasure in the promotion of our bodily health in a massage able to be ‘universally recommended’ (required, demanded), on par (following her argument in the aforementioned paragraph) with the gratification in humour? It would seem not. For instance, Kant explicitly *contrasts* the gratification in a massage with the mental movement in the sublime, which is normative and contains a claim to universal validity. The satisfaction in the sublime, he says, ‘must be represented as universally valid in its **quantity**, as without interest in its **quality**, as subjective purposiveness in its **relation**, and the latter, as far as its **modality** is concerned, as necessary’ (KU, 5: 247; original emphasis).

If the argument does not work in the case of the massage, it would seem not to be able to work (within a Kantian framework) in the case of humour, either.

Kant says that unlike the massage, the experience of the sublime leaves behind a morally useful feeling of the elevation of the mind, or a feeling of freedom. The sublime presentations ‘leave behind a disposition of mind that, even if only indirectly, has influence on the consciousness of its strength and resolution in regard to that which brings with it intellectual purposiveness (the supersensible)’ (KU, 5: 273). This, a bodily massage cannot do. He explains:

For otherwise all these emotions belong only to the motion that we are glad to have for the sake of health. The agreeable exhaustion that follows such an agitation by the play of affects is an enjoyment of the wellbeing resulting from the equilibrium of the various vital forces that is thus produced in us, which in the end comes down to the same thing as that which the voluptuaries of the Orient find so comforting when they have their bodies as it were kneaded, and all their muscles and joints softly pressed and flexed; only in the first case [i.e. the sublime] the moving principle is for the most part in us, while in the latter it is entirely outside us. (KU, 5: 273-4)

The massage is the object of an interest (in the Kantian sense), promotes bodily health, and feels good and gratifies. It would seem that, officially at least, Kant thinks that the pleasure in humour also has these features. And that is one reason why he thinks humour production cannot be a beautiful art.

Thus, if we were to (reconstructively) argue that humour production could in principle be a Kantian fine art (and, like Zinkin, I so argue), I would prefer the more imaginative-intellectualist route outlined above. This is compatible with noting that there can be bodily *effects* in humour responses – just as, indeed, there are bodily effects in the experiences of the sublime and the beautiful, qua release of vital forces (*Lebenskräfte*) and the promotion of the feeling of life. In humour, in other words, the bodily feeling need not be seen as the main source of the pleasure, but instead as an

effect of the mental play.<sup>16</sup> This promotion of the feeling of life is analogous to what occurs in the sublime and beautiful, where the associated *bodily* effects are the result of an intellectual activity or movement, one stronger and quick, the other calmer and more contemplative.

As Zinkin observes in her fourth endnote, Kant claims that in humour the body is affected *through* the soul. This means that the experience of humour is much richer, intellectually, than a massage, in the ways outlined above. It thus seems more persuasive to argue via the more imaginative-intellectualist than the corporeal route: *my faculties are in the appropriate state in appreciating (or making)*<sup>17</sup> *this instance of humour, so you too should take pleasure.*

This way of arguing seems stronger than saying: *We all value health. What promotes health and feels good (for all) should be valued by all.* Now, there is a sense in which the latter makes for a strong argument. It seems to hold for food and water, for instance, which is (or should be) valued by all. But it does not specify which, or how, much food or water should be valued by individuals, and here one can begin to see the problem. We get an argument for generality, but not for universality.

The issue, if this reasoning is applied to humour, is that it keeps humour at the level of the agreeable and the 'interested' (in a way that is not, as morality is, based on pure practical reason). After all, what promotes health for *me*, might not promote health for you. Likewise, a joke that might be good (health-promoting) for me, might not be good for you. Unless, of course, it works at an imaginative-intellectual level, on par with beauty, in the full Kantian, normative sense I am proposing. So, it seems better to aim for universality or universal validity, and thus fine art status, via an *intellectual*, not *bodily*, route. Thankfully, the imaginative-intellectualist way also seems to be implicit in some of Kant's comments on the response to humour as a play with aesthetic ideas, a play in which the understanding is initially unable to settle on a resolution, analogous, in beauty, to 'schematiz[ing] without a concept' (KU, 5: 287).

I now turn to morality and then closure. As can already be seen from the foregoing discussion, and as Zinkin has pointed out, Kant is concerned about the lack of seriousness in humour as well as its lack of connection to morality.

Since we broadly agree on this point, I will take the opportunity to clarify and elaborate here. I think there is another way Kant should have been even more open to humour, namely, when it comes to some forms of comedy, ridicule, and satire (forms that to some extent he examined in minor works, lectures, and notes).

These forms of humour can be used for social critique and reform. As Zinkin notes, Kant distinguishes between *profound* and *superficial* wit. Profound wit touches on more serious matters and is the more enduring kind. Ridicule and satire (or satirical comedies) would typically count as profound in this sense. Superficial wit instead involves a more fleeting play. An example would be a pun: *Somebody is being punny!* When it is poorly executed, light wit runs the risk of becoming tiresome, annoying or even repulsive (*groan*).

Kant also distinguishes between *wholesome* and *harmful* ridicule. This distinction seems rather straightforward: wholesome ridicule requires treating other people with respect along the principles determined by Kant's ethical theory. Here, again, it would seem that satires that have morally or politically beneficial effects would be wholesome and (overall) harmless, though perhaps it might not be *perceived* that way

by the subjects of the ridicule or the butt of the jest. And it is of course possible that a given humourist goes too far.<sup>18</sup>

Given his accounts of profound wit and of wholesome ridicule, Kant seems to think that in principle humour can be beneficial in the way such satires and comedies can, even if it may be hard to identify or know when they are successful or beneficial. In any case, if that is right, it seems that one could offer a longer Kantian account of how such instances of humour, artworks, and artistic productions (broadened, say, to include comedies and films), with sufficient time and exposure, could help modify and improve people's attitudes, and therefore be 'serious', or express moral ideas, in the way Kant thinks that spirited art can and should.

But perhaps a further worry for the idea that humour production could be a *schöne Kunst* is that the humour or satire (joke, comedy) aims to *please* (and thus fails to be serious in this sense). If the intention is just to elicit pleasure, it would seem the work could not count as beautiful, an objection might go.

But here it matters *how* the work (joke, comedic act, satire) aims to please. Sure, the pleasure, for a Kantian account, cannot be a merely agreeable satisfaction (having as an aim only, and by any means, to elicit laughter or a humour response). That would be on par with the massage. But in a richer, more serious, way, the artwork or comedic act could give rise to aesthetic pleasure due to its cleverness, its play of aesthetic ideas or its incisive and ultimately beneficial social critique. Given the work's more 'profound' thoughts or 'ideas', the resulting pleasure would then arise, as in the case of spirited beauty, from cognition rather than from agreeable sensations.

Now, finally, to closure. Zinkin comments on a point of disanalogy between humour and beauty: a joke supposedly has a certain 'closure', whereas it seems a given beautiful work or object is instead open and indeterminate. She writes: 'It seems, jokes have "punch lines" which one "gets", whereas the pleasure of beauty is in the harmonious play of the cognitive faculties. The pleasure in a joke is thus ultimately in the closure that occurs to what has been opened up by the incongruity'.

I admit that, when one 'gets' a joke, there is a momentary closure. In this sense, there is a temporary resolution to some jokes. In humour studies, a subset of incongruity theory is suitably named *incongruity-resolution* theory.

However, even when at a discrete moment there is closure to some jokes in this sense, in another sense, at least for a good or successful joke, one that endures in a culture or community, there does not seem to be closure, any more than there is closure to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* once the last scene ends. Rather, people tell the joke over and over (just as the play is produced again and again and viewers watch repeatedly). 'Have you heard the one about . . . ?'

Some bad jokes, say, the worst 'knock knock' jokes, might have closure in the sense Zinkin has in mind. However, these jokes are for children in an anglophone subset of the world's culture: far from the universal standard of jokes. You get the joke's punchline and maybe don't even find the joke amusing (let alone laugh). It is closed and closed off. Maybe even the *best* of the knock knock jokes are closed in this way. If so, that would be a problem for this particular genre of joking-making or humour production. But I do not see why we should conclude that all jokes have to be closed off (or have closure) even once they are momentarily gotten or resolved by participants at discrete times.<sup>19</sup>

Consider Kant's own influential description of apprehending a joke. On his view, we waver back and forth between moments of incongruity and resolution. Incongruity arises because a rich imaginative content is provided in the joke or narrative, and the understanding goes looking for a solution to the initially puzzling scenario or situation. One goes looking, since one's cognitive expectation is disappointed, or, as Kant puts it, disappears into 'nothing'. Then one thinks one finds a momentary explanation: the illusion disappears, even if for just a moment. In other words, resolution can be said to emerge when the illusion goes away, and one 'gets' the joke.

Kant sometimes suggests that even *this* provisional explanation disappears or is not fulfilled – as might occur, say, with a truly rich joke or comedic narrative. When that happens, the mind is disappointed *again* or wonders if the explanation is *really*, indeed, a good fit for the joke. In this way, the process goes back and forth or wavers, until it peters out. Meanwhile, and crucially, all this is physically reflected in the body as the diaphragm's quivering back and forth – until, finally, one attends to something else.

Colin McQuillan

McQuillan discusses a change in the concept of 'aesthetics' within both the German tradition as well as Kant's own thought. Like Williams, who stresses the continuity with the early aesthetics on (a priori) sociality, McQuillan nonetheless generally emphasizes the continuity between early and late Kant, a thesis also found in an earlier book on the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) (McQuillan 2016).

Specifically, McQuillan emphasizes the continuity of Kant's thought with his early view of sensibility conceived as intuitive (given) cognition. McQuillan writes: 'The principle of sensible comprehension distinguishes Kant's conception of aesthetics from his rationalist predecessors, because it defines sensible cognition as 'intuitive cognition' rather than 'confused cognition'. He holds that Kant treats sensible cognition as cognition that is *given intuitively* through the senses, and subjective in this sense. Related to this, McQuillan writes that, 'During the first phase of the development of his views on aesthetics, the principle of sensible comprehension is not just a feature of Kant's account of the pleasure of aesthetic experience or the source of aesthetic normativity. Instead, it is a defining feature of his conception of aesthetics'. At the same time, however, McQuillan notes the increased role played in 1790 by the *feeling* (*Gefühl*) of pleasure and displeasure (*Lust* and *Unlust*). He writes: 'Although he [Kant] tended to conflate sensibility and feeling during the first two phases of his career, the new conception of aesthetics he defends in the third *Critique* requires him to separate them, and to deny that the principle of sensible comprehension plays any role in aesthetics'.

I agree that in 1790 Kant continues to deny that a *science* of aesthetics is possible, because he takes the principle of purposiveness to be a merely 'subjective' principle of the reflecting power of judgement. I also agree that this conception of aesthetics is consistent with Kant's 'pre-critical' aesthetics in some respects, though it is also different in other ones, because Kant's 'critical' aesthetics is based on an a priori principle associated with the power of judgement and the faculty of feeling pleasure and displeasure, rather than empirical principles derived from intuition or sensibility. As Kant writes in §20: 'They [pure judgements of taste] must thus have a subjective principle, which determines what pleases or displeases only *through feeling* and not



through concepts, but yet with universal validity. Such a principle, however, could only be regarded as a common sense' (KU, 5: 238; emphasis added).

McQuillan holds that the early Kant had a conception of 'aesthetics' that is distinct from the one in the Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgement. I agree that Kant's conception of aesthetics changed over the decades; indeed, this is not very surprising. Before the composition of the work of 1790, Kant did not think, for instance, that there was a *principle* of taste (as a principle of purposiveness), let alone an a priori one.<sup>20</sup> The early Kant recognized empirical generalization and consensus in aesthetic judgements but not a (supposed) universality of judgements of taste. Likewise, the later Kant emphasizes the *autonomy* of taste.<sup>21</sup>

In short, McQuillan emphasizes the role of intuition or sensibility as the core element in Kant's early aesthetics rather than just one element among others. He urges me to see the *feeling of pleasure and displeasure*, distinguished from sensibility, as an important, novel concept that separates the thought in 1790 from the early aesthetics. McQuillan thus engages with the very idea of aesthetics, seeing the discipline we now call 'aesthetics' as linked to sensibility in the early period, and the feeling (of pleasure and displeasure) in the later one.

Since I broadly agree here, I will make two remarks, perhaps of an inviting or clarificatory nature, one concerning the relation between feeling and the free play of the faculties, and another one about the role of feeling (*Gefühl*) in Kant's early treatise, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764).

I agree that in the third Critique Kant's new conception of aesthetics requires him to separate sensibility and feeling. But I would add that a conceptual descendent of the principle of sensible comprehension survives, namely, in the form of the harmonious (free) play of the faculties. A theory of free mental play between the faculties of imagination and the understanding is already present in the mid-1770s, and there, it seems, a relative of the principle of sensible comprehension can be detected. I thus find myself emphasizing continuity even more than McQuillan here. There is both feeling and a descendent of the principle of sensible comprehension (*viz.*, the free play of the faculties) in the theory of 1790. But this raises the question for McQuillan: What is the relation of this feeling to the principle of sensible comprehension's conceptual descendent? I think any story about the role of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure still needs to account for and explain its relation to the free play of the imagination and understanding.

A related methodological question can be raised: What is the role of feeling in the early published writings? This is one of the few cases where we actually have not a scribbled-on napkin but a recognized publication – the gold standard for texts in a developmental-historical study – from the pre-critical period that is relevant to Kant's aesthetics. Kant uses *feeling* to engage in (among other things) *aesthetics* in the empiricist-leaning (and highly controversial) work of 1764, the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, a title that clearly invokes Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), with Kant employing 'feeling' rather than 'ideas' in his title. Burke's work, in my view, counts as a work of aesthetics (for mid-eighteenth century Britain) as much as one of moral psychology, even if Burke does not use the term 'aesthetics' in the *Enquiry*. By analogy, Kant's work should to some extent count as doing eighteenth-century, western aesthetics (even if it contains much else). After all, as McQuillan is aware, modern

western aesthetics (if not understood in the Baumgartenian or Meierian sense) was at the time an incipient discipline not separated off by firm disciplinary boundaries.

As McQuillan has noted (in discussion), in the *Observations* and in the 1760s generally, Kant's views of 'aesthetics' are closely tied to his ideas in physical geography and anthropology. For instance, Kant's earliest (as far as we know) remarks on taste come from the 1750s. In a physical geography lecture, Kant is tracking the alleged tastes of various peoples<sup>22</sup> while using the language of perfection and imperfection: 'By taste I understand the sensible judgement of the perfection or imperfection of what moves the senses' (V-PG/Holstein, 26.1: 100). In a marginal comment on Meier from between 1752 and 1756, Kant writes about taste along similar perfectionist lines (R 1748; 16: 100): 'A sensible judging of perfection is called taste' (cited in Clewis 2023: 32 n.35).

I further admit that the first two Sections of the *Observations* are taken by Kant to contribute to an *empirical* study of human nature in its unity and diversity. To be sure, the *Observations* is closer to works by Burke, Hutcheson, and Hume than to works of aesthetics by Baumgarten and Meier. Moreover, Kant does not use the word 'aesthetics' in the *Observations*. He does not consider what he is doing there to be a part of narrowly construed philosophy: on the first page, he calls himself a *Beobachter* (observer) rather than a philosopher.

However, Kant uses 'aesthetics' in the public *Nachricht* (*Announcement*) of his lectures of the same time (1765), connecting aesthetics with the 'rules of taste' (*Announcement*, 2: 311) (a passage also quoted in McQuillan's remarks). Even if this is not the same sense of 'aesthetics' as in 1790 (let alone today), it is still revealing that Kant relies on 'feeling' in the 1764 *Observations* and is thinking of *aesthetics* in terms of *taste* at this time. This seems in line with Kant's (not Baumgarten's) own early view, found in many notes and lectures, that aesthetics is a criticism (not a discipline or science), one that is capable only of empirical generalizations, that is, 'rules' only in a loose sense. It is clearly not yet the concept of feeling found in the work of 1790, but the notion of feeling does seem to play a relatively important role in Kant's early aesthetics. Or at least a role that deserves to be investigated further.

This leads to my final topic: continuity and discontinuity. I think in historical-developmental studies, it is perfectly reasonable to emphasize continuity, discontinuity, or both. I tend to emphasize, at different times, both of these. McQuillan writes that 'Clewis ... might give readers the impression that Kant's aesthetics is merely a collection of arguments for different positions, with shifting motivations and justifications, depending on the context in which they were presented'. As noted, McQuillan generally (though not always) wants to emphasize points of continuity, even if he acknowledges both. I think we are in agreement here, for he writes, 'Doing so [applying my book's method to Kant's notion of 'aesthetics'] would reveal that Kant's conception of aesthetics is consistent in some ways throughout his career, though there are also crucial changes in his views at different times'. And again: 'I would argue, in conclusion, that applying the methods that Clewis employs in *Origins* to aesthetics reveals that there are, nevertheless, important consistencies in Kant's conception of aesthetics during the three phases of his career as well as some decisive changes in his views'.

As can be seen from my précis of *Origins*, I, like McQuillan, examine some continuous points and some discontinuous ones. In my discussion of the play of the

faculties as descended from the principle of sensible comprehension, I emphasized continuity more than he did, for he stressed the role of the 1790 concept of feeling as distinct from sensibility (and desire and cognition). On the other hand, as can be seen in (for instance) my chapter on the thick and the thin conceptions of genius, and from the chapter on Kant's various formalisms, I also sometimes stress the discontinuities and tensions in Kant's account. Yet I stopped short of claiming that the work of 1790 is *entirely* a product of Kant's putting together notes from different periods, as if Kant were creating a tapestry out of napkins.

## Notes

1 As I noted in the book, terms such as 'empiricist' and 'rationalist', if conventional, can be problematic (p. 26 n. 8). Grote (2017), for instance, uses more theologically inflected terms to describe the period.

2 See Winegar (2024).

3 On communitarian theories of aesthetic value and aesthetic normativity, see also Riggle (2022) and Matherne (2019), cited by Williams's contribution here.

4 In her 2024 paper, Williams usefully develops these ideas, so one could turn to that paper as a supplement to her response; however, in fairness to the symposium format, I shall tend to refer to it in the footnotes or references. Williams (2024) there argues that a priori sociality does not threaten the autonomy of the judge, and, moreover, that it is not only compatible with it, but that it is also required for aesthetic autonomy.

5 For similar views, see Hannah Ginsborg (1990), who holds that the *feeling* in the judgement of taste asserts its own intersubjective validity. For an exchange on this passage concerning whether there are one or instead two 'acts', see Ginsborg (2017) and Guyer (2017). For further criticism of the view that 'aesthetic judgment and pleasure are purely self-referential (about themselves/each other/their own universal communicability)', see Zuckert (2007: 189).

6 Following Williams, in this section I leave aside the sublime. I also discuss the beauty of art and nature together here, though perhaps judgements of beautiful *art* require more social formation and cultivation of taste than do judgements of beautiful *nature*, which seem more rooted in the shared cognitive faculties of those who are judging disinterestedly and aesthetically. For a separate 'analytic' of judgements of beauty of *art*, see Reiter and Geiger 2024.

7 §9 continues to be interpreted anew. For instance, Kinnaman (2024) has recently concluded that the basis for the normativity of *taste* (the expectation that others ought to agree with our judgements) is the same as the basis for the normativity of *cognitive* judgements. One premise leading to his conclusion involves reading Kant's 'cognition in general' in §9 (KU, 5: 217) to mean 'integration into a unified system of empirical cognition'.

8 For emphasis on communication and concept revision, see also Vaccarino Bremner 2021.

9 Kant states that *sensus communis* is 'a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (a priori) of everyone else's way of representing in thought'. Kant claims that 'this happens by one holding his judgement up *not so much to the actual* as to the *merely possible* judgements of others' (KU §40, 5: 293-4; emphasis added). Williams then comments: 'We should be careful in how we read this passage, however. As Kant makes clear elsewhere, the ability to hold one's judgements up to the *possible* judgements of others requires prior engagement with the *actual* judgements of others' (2024: 210). To me, this risks sounding like empirical sociality. It is, moreover, unclear to me both how, exactly, prior engagement with the actual judgements of others is required, and how one would get started in the process without first having the ability.

10 The term 'erroneous' or 'mistaken' sounds more objectivist than Kant's theory can ultimately allow, since aesthetic judgements are not objective judgements. Nevertheless, Kant claims that in the judgement of taste we can correctly speak as *if* the object (of nature) itself were beautiful (KU, 5: 245; see also section VII, 5: 190: the object is called beautiful), or as if the judgement 'were objective' (5: 281).

11 Compare Williams (2024).

12 Likewise, Shell (2022) as well as Reiter and Geiger (2024) stress the development and cultivation of taste. Note the role of formation in Reiter and Geiger's reconstructed *fourth* moment (concerning

universality and/or necessity) that, in their paper, is supposed to pertain to judgements of the beauty of *art* (not nature): ‘That is beautiful art which evokes the continuing pleasurable reflection on an idea of reason as the object of a potentially necessary satisfaction, *accessible to all who have formed their taste in a way that enables them to appreciate the work before them*’ (my emphasis). As they put it, reflecting their separation of the beauty of nature and art, ‘The appreciation of art, moreover, requires the formation of taste, whereas the beauty of nature engages a fundamental cognitive capacity.’ And again: ‘For in actuality, the appreciation of a work of art requires the culturally and historically appropriate formation of taste in a particular art form.’ At present, I find their ‘disjunctive’ (art vs. beauty) view appealing, and it seems compatible with Williams’s tendency to consider cultivation and *art* together.

13 As is widely noted in humour studies, not all responses to humour result in *laughter*. It seems best to see the physical responses to humour as lying on a continuum between a recognition that is hardly noticeable to peers (though perhaps perceptible to psychometric study and measurement), to a smile, chuckle, guffaw, howl, and, finally, to ‘losing it’ and dying with laughter.

14 On humour and fine art, see also Lauren Olin’s comments on *Kant’s Humorous Writings* (Clewis 2021) in (Olin 2025), and my response (Clewis 2025).

15 I add the term ‘imaginative’ here in order to emphasize the imagination’s playing with aesthetic ideas in humour and to avoid the appearance of attributing to Kant an intellectualist-conceptualist theory of aesthetics he would have associated with Baumgarten and Meier.

16 The role of bodily gratification in humour might also be compared to the issue of motives or drives in the so-called Incorporation Thesis, i.e. the notion that a drive is not good or bad *per se*, but only in the way in which it is ‘incorporated’ into the maxim of one’s action (*Religion*, 6: 23–4).

17 I leave aside differences between a production and reception aesthetics.

18 Kant has in mind authors such as Samuel Butler, Henry Fielding, and Jonathan Swift. What would that look like today? An interesting case here (suggested by Zinkin in discussion) in recent film history is Sasha Baron Cohen’s *Borat* (2006), a biting, and to many hilarious, look at recent U.S. culture – Americans’ mores, norms, and habits, especially their responses to foreigners and their treatment of each other.

19 Zinkin and I may be in some agreement here, for she writes: ‘Still, one could argue, like poetry, jokes do open up to us new ways of seeing something.’

20 It is an interesting question whether there are one or instead many principles of taste and pure aesthetic judgement (and what they might be). Passages suggesting or referring to a (or *the*) principle include: KU, 5: 177, 180, 184, 193; and in the First Introduction: 20: 209, 242–3. For two (among many) scholars who write as if there is just one principle, see e.g. Williams (2024) as well as Zinkin’s response here. I briefly discuss this issue in *Origins*, p. 45. For apparent support of the view that there are principles, see Kant’s letter to Reinhold (Br, 10: 514–15), as well as the third *Critique* claim that aesthetic judgements ‘prove an immediate relation of this faculty [of cognition] to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure in accordance with some *a priori* principles’ (5: 169).

21 Kant may have applied the notion of autonomy in his aesthetic theory as a result of changes in his practical philosophy, as Rueger (2024) has most recently argued.

22 I here acknowledge, but leave aside, Kant’s racism.

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