Reed Winegar

The Beautiful and the Sublime in Kant's Early Natural Philosophy

Abstract: Paul Guyer's work has drawn much attention to the connection between aesthetics, morality, and teleology in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Indeed, Guyer has argued that Kant's recognition of such a connection in the 1780s provided the major impetus behind Kant's decision to write a third *Critique*. This essay aims to refine Guyer's interpretation of the development of Kant's views regarding this connection. It does so by focusing on the role of beauty and sublimity in Kant's early natural philosophy. These considerations demonstrate the need to refine Guyer's own interpretation in two ways. First, Guyer's claim that a connection between aesthetics and moral teleology was absent in Kant's thought prior to the third *Critique* needs to be moderated. Second, Kant's early conception of the sublime anticipates more of the third *Critique*'s account than Guyer recognizes.

Keywords: aesthetics, beauty, sublime, morality, teleology

1 Introduction

Paul Guyer's research has always emphasized the importance of Kant's aesthetics. Guyer's first book, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*,[1] quickly established itself as a classic in this area, and Kant's aesthetics remained a central feature of Guyer's subsequent work, evidenced by further books like *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*[2] and *Values of Beauty*.[3] Yet, while Guyer's *focus* on Kant's aesthetics has remained consistent, his *approach* to Kant's aesthetics has undergone significant change. Guyer himself has acknowledged the changes in his approach. Reflecting back on the character of his work after *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Guyer writes:

> I did not find myself revising the interpretative framework of *Kant and the Claims of Taste* but placing it in a larger context or, more precisely, in two contexts: the historical context of Kant's relation to eighteenth-century aesthetics, and the philosophical context of its relation to Kant's

1 Guyer, Paul: *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. Cambridge, MA 1977.

2 Guyer, Paul: *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne 1993.

3 Guyer, Paul: *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics.* New York 2005.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111544731-007

> moral philosophy — which relation, I became increasingly convinced provided the fundamental motivation for Kant's excursion into aesthetic theory.[4]

As Guyer notes here, both Kant's 18th-century context and the third *Critique*'s consideration of the relationship between aesthetics and morality became increasingly central to his interpretation of Kant's aesthetics. Indeed, Guyer came to find Kant's chief motivation for writing a third *Critique* in Kant's appreciation of aesthetics' moral significance. Although Guyer advances aspects of this interpretation in various works, one finds an especially comprehensive treatment in his essay "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality: Kant's Lectures on Anthropology and the Development of his Aesthetic Theory."[5] This essay considers the development of Kant's aesthetics on the basis of Kant's anthropology lectures. Kant lectured on anthropology repeatedly over the decades, using the empirical psychology portion of Alexander Baumgarten's *Metaphysics* as a textbook. Baumgarten, who gave the term 'aesthetics' its modern meaning, discusses aesthetics within the empirical psychology section of his *Metaphysics*. Therefore, the lectures on anthropology provided Kant with ample opportunity to remark on issues in aesthetics. On the basis of Kant's anthropology lectures, Guyer draws the striking conclusion that Kant had already formulated most of the distinctive aspects of the third *Critique*'s mature aesthetic theory, such as the notion of an *a priori* principle of taste and the concept of a harmonious play of the cognitive faculties, in the 1770s, long before he ever envisioned writing a third *Critique*.

On Guyer's interpretation, Kant's ultimate decision in the late 1780s to write a third *Critique* was motivated less by new developments in Kant's aesthetic theory as such and more by Kant's increasing appreciation of aesthetics' significance for moral teleology. In particular, Guyer claims that Kant's increasing appreciation of the relationship between aesthetics and moral teleology provided the chief impetus for Kant's decision to write a third *Critique*:

> [...] what the lectures on anthropology show is that what the *Critique of Judgment* adds to all the elements of his aesthetic theory that were already in place by the mid-1780s is all and only those elements of the theory that reveal the teleological significance of the experience of beauty and of the existence of both natural and artistic beauty.[6]

According to Guyer, the suggestion of a relationship between aesthetics and moral teleology was absent in Kant's earlier thought and represents a key innovation of

4 Guyer, Paul: *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*.
5 Guyer, Paul: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality."
6 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 165.

the third *Critique*. Referring to a well-known 1787 letter to Reinhold that contains Kant's reference to the work that would become the third *Critique*, Guyer writes, "What is unprecedented in Kant's work, however, is the suggestion in the letter to Reinhold that there is an intimate connection between aesthetics and teleology."[7] Indeed, Guyer takes this "intimate connection" to constitute Kant's primary motivation for writing a third *Critique*: "We can now see that it must be precisely this connection that finally enabled Kant to write the third *Critique* […]".[8]

There are, of course, various questions that one might raise regarding Guyer's interpretation of the third *Critique*'s origins. For example, in the same 1787 letter to Reinhold mentioned above, Kant famously proclaims the discovery of an *a priori* principle of feeling.[9] One might be tempted to take this discovery of an *a priori* principle of feeling, rather than a specific concern with the significance of aesthetics for moral teleology, to have provided the primary impetus behind Kant's decision to write a third *Critique*. Guyer is aware of this objection. But he questions the extent to which Kant's 1787 conception of an *a priori* principle of feeling is really new, noting that "the lectures make it clear as no other sources do that Kant had in fact long considered the possibility and sometimes even asserted that there are *a priori* principles for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, in the form of principles of taste."[10] Moreover, Guyer is reluctant to locate the third *Critique*'s primary origins in "a pedantic desire" for a complete taxonomy of *a priori* principles, suggesting instead that Kant's new appreciation of the relationship between aesthetics and moral teleology should be seen as "a much more profound and powerful motivation."[11]

My aim in this essay will not be to assess Guyer's proposal regarding the specific motivations that might have prompted Kant to write a third *Critique*. Rather, I want to focus on Guyer's related assessment of which aspects of the third *Critique* count as new innovations. In doing so, I will argue that Guyer's interpretation of the third *Critique*'s innovations regarding the relationships between aesthetic, morality, and teleology needs to be refined.[12] Guyer's interpretation draws heavily on Kant's anthropology lectures as well as many other aspects of Kant's corpus. Yet, there is one relevant area of Kant's thought to which Guyer's interpretation does

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Br, AA 10: 514.

10 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 164.

11 Guyer, Paul: *A History of Modern Aesthetics, Volume 1: The Eighteenth-Century*. Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, New Delhi, Singapore 2014, 428.

12 I have discussed other aspects of the third *Critique*'s treatment of aesthetics' relationship to teleology in Winegar, Reed (2017), "Kant and Hutcheson on Aesthetics and Teleology" and Winegar, Reed (2021), "Kant's Antinomy of Taste and the Supersensible."

not pay serious attention — namely, Kant's early natural philosophy. I believe that a complete assessment of Kant's developing views regarding the relationship between aesthetics, morality, and teleology cannot afford to neglect this area of Kant's thought.[13] Based on a consideration of the aesthetic notions of the beautiful and the sublime in Kant's early natural philosophy, I will argue that Guyer's interpretation of the third *Critique*'s innovations regarding aesthetics, morality, and teleology needs to be amended in two respects. First, contrary to Guyer's suggestion, "an intimate connection between aesthetics and teleology" is not "unprecedented in Kant's work" prior to the 1787 letter to Reinhold.[14] In fact, aesthetics and teleology, including a kind of moral teleology, had long been intertwined in Kant's thought. Second, while Guyer notes that Kant refers to the sublime "only rarely in the anthropology lectures," we will see that the sublime played a significant role in Kant's early natural philosophy and that this early treatment of the sublime anticipates more of Kant's third *Critique* account than Guyer recognizes.[15] However, recognizing these points hardly undermines Guyer's overall contention that the third *Critique* introduces important innovations in Kant's thought regarding the connections between aesthetics, morality, and teleology. Rather, it simply helps put into relief the more specific aspects of those connections that should count as the third *Critique*'s true innovations.

13 The aesthetic dimensions of Kant's early natural philosophy have attracted minimal attention. In his recent book *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*, Robert Clewis notes in passing that the *Universal Natural History* refers to both sensory and intellectual beauty and that the book "contains what is likely Kant's earliest published statement on what he would later identify as the sublime;" Clewis, Robert (2023), *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*, 163. But he does not analyze these points in detail. Edward Kanterian acknowledges the "aesthetic element" in Kant's early natural philosophy, briefly relating Kant's early comments on awe and sublimity to Rudolf Otto's conception of the numinous; Kanterian, Edward (2018), *Kant, God, and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn*, 95. However, Kanterian does not consider these points in relation to Kant's later positions in the third *Critique*. Susan Shell briefly suggests that the treatment of attraction and repulsion in the *Universal Natural History*'s treatment of the sun anticipates the third *Critique*'s notion of the dynamical sublime; Shell, Susan Meld (1996), *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community*, 61–62. Manfred Kuehn notes that aesthetic concepts were often related to the 18th-century tradition of physico-theology, but he does not discuss their role in Kant's own early natural philosophy; Kuehn, Manfred (2001), *Kant: A Biography*, 345. Martin Schönfeld's sustained treatment of Kant's early natural philosophy (in Schönfeld, Martin (2000), *The Philosophy of the Young Kant*) largely ignores its aesthetic dimension.

14 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 165.

15 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 185.

2 Guyer on Aesthetics, Morality, and Teleology in the third *Critique*

Allow me to begin by presenting Guyer's interpretation in more detail. In assessing the origins of Kant's third *Critique*, Guyer recognizes that writing a "'critique of taste' was one of Kant's long-standing philosophical ambitions."[16] Kant's correspondence from the 1770s shows that Kant originally intended for the work that resulted in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to include a theory of taste.[17] However, the *Critique of Pure Reason* that appeared in 1781 does not contain any such theory. Moreover, in 1781, Kant did not envision writing any further critiques, aiming instead to develop a new metaphysics of morals and metaphysics of nature. Kant's decision to write a second critique, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, resulted from the process of revising the first *Critique* in preparation for the second edition of 1787.[18] Kant initially planned to publish the second edition with a new appendix containing a critique of pure practical reason, but this planned appendix eventually took on a life of its own, becoming the *Critique of Practical Reason.* Yet, Kant's plans for the *Critique of Pure Reason*'s second edition do not seem to have included any new plans for a critique of taste. Why then did Kant suddenly decide to write a third *Critique*, containing a "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment"?

As mentioned previously, we find Kant's first reference to the work that became the third *Critique* in a 1787 letter to Reinhold.[19] However, Guyer observes that Kant's "letter is initially confusing, for it suggests two different things as the key to Kant's project."[20] These are (1) Kant's discovery of an *a priori* principle of feeling and (2) teleology. As noted above, Guyer takes this suggestion of an intimate relationship between aesthetics and teleology to be "unprecedented" in Kant's prior thought and to have constituted Kant's primary motivation for writing a third *Critique*. What precisely are the connections between aesthetics and teleology that Guyer has in mind here? Although the third *Critique* provides a famous discussion of teleology in regards to organic generation, Guyer primarily interprets the letter to Reinhold in terms of Kant's *moral teleology*. Kant claims that the third *Critique* aims to help bridge the gulf between nature and freedom. In an often quoted passage, Kant writes:

16 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 163.

17 Br, AA 10: 514.24.

18 For a detailed overview of the second *Critique*'s origins, see Klemme, Heiner F. (2010), "The Origin and Aim of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason.*"

19 Br, AA 10: 513–516.

20 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 164.

> Now although there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible, just as if there were so many different worlds, the first of which can have no influence on the second: yet the latter **should** have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.[21]

According to Guyer, Kant's chief point here is that we need to be able to regard nature as amenable to the realization of our moral ends. Guyer observes that this point might initially seem puzzling. After all, the second *Critique*'s prior discussions of moral determination and the highest good might seem to have already shown that we can realize our moral ends in nature. What gulf between freedom and nature actually remains to be bridged?[22] Guyer answers this question by proposing that the second *Critique* advances *rational* arguments to justify the claim that we can realize our moral ends in nature, whereas the third *Critique* speaks to our needs as not only rational but also *sensible* beings, for whom the rational recognition of the possibility of realizing our moral ends in nature needs to be integrated with feeling and sensibility.[23]

Guyer notes several ways that the third *Critique* aims to speak to our needs as moral yet sensible beings. For instance, one point that the third *Critique* makes regarding the relationship between morality and sensibility is that aesthetic pleasure can help to provide a propaedeutic for moral feeling. Another point that the third *Critique* makes is that artworks can present moral ideas to sensibility. However, as Guyer recognizes, these suggestions are already found in earlier texts and are not entirely new in the third *Critique*.[24] Guyer seems, instead, to see the real innovations of the third *Critique* in its suggestion that our aesthetic experiences of beauty and

---

21 KU, AA 05: 175.36–176.09: Ob nun zwar eine unübersehbare Kluft zwischen dem Gebiete des Naturbegriffs, als dem Sinnlichen, und dem Gebiete des Freiheitsbegriffs, als dem Übersinnlichen, befestigt ist, so daß von dem ersteren zum anderen (also vermittelst des theoretischen Gebrauchs der Vernunft) kein Übergang möglich ist, gleich als ob es so viel verschiedene Welten wären, deren erste auf die zweite keinen Einfluß haben kann: so *soll* doch diese auf jene einen Einfluß haben, nämlich der Freiheitsbegriff soll den durch seine Gesetze aufgegebenen Zweck in der Sinnenwelt wirklich machen; und die Natur muß folglich auch so gedacht werden können, daß die Gesetzmäßigkeit ihrer Form wenigstens zur Möglichkeit der in ihr zu bewirkenden Zwecke nach Freiheitsgesetzen zusammenstimme.

22 Guyer: *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 28.

23 Guyer: *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 30.

24 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 181 and 184.

sublimity can make both our own moral freedom and nature's amenability to the realization of moral ends palpable to us. For instance, Guyer notes that Kant mentions the sublime "only rarely in the anthropology lectures, and then only in a limited way that suggests that even without proportion and symmetry the sheer magnitude of natural objects can affect the magnitude of our own feeling."[25] But in the third *Critique*'s "Analytic of the Sublime," Guyer notes that the aesthetic experience of the sublime makes "the independence of practical reason from mere nature palpable."[26] Similarly, Guyer takes the third *Critique* to introduce Kant's conception of beauty as a symbol of the morally-good, such that beauty provides a sensible, symbolic presentation "of the freedom of the will that is the basis of morality."[27] However, as noted above, Guyer is especially interested in the third *Critique*'s treatment of beauty's relationship to moral teleology, which he takes to constitute the third *Critique*'s most significant innovation: "The greatest innovation of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, however, is its unification of aesthetics into Kant's overarching vision of teleology."[28] Here Guyer emphasizes §42's discussion of the intellectual interest of beauty, where Kant famously indicates that natural beauty provides a hint of nature's amenability to the realization of moral ends. Guyer writes:

> Our deepest interest, of course, is that nature contain a ground for assuming its correspondence with the satisfaction of our moral interest, which is independent of all empirical interests but not of the interest of practical reason itself; but we can interpret nature's creation of beauty as evidence of its hospitality to our unselfish interest in morality as well. This conception of the intellectual interest in beauty does not depend upon an innovation in Kant's aesthetic theory itself, but rather in his development of the new moral teleology that is the deepest innovation of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.[29]

In a similar vein, Guyer also takes the third *Critique*'s novel characterization of genius as a gift of nature to indicate nature's amenability to the realization of moral ends, because it too illustrates that "the existence of artistic as well as natural beauty is evidence of the harmonious fit between nature and human objectives."[30] These, then, seem to be the main aspects of the relationship between aesthetics, morality, and teleology that Guyer takes to be distinctively new to Kant's thought in the third *Critique*.

25 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 185.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 186.
29 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 187.
30 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 188.

3 Beauty and Teleology in Kant's Early Natural Philosophy

As noted above, my aim is neither to criticize Guyer's interpretation of the third *Critique* nor to criticize his interpretation of the anthropology lectures. Instead, I want to indicate a lacuna in Guyer's overall account of Kant's development. Namely, Guyer does not consider the role that aesthetic concepts like beauty and sublimity play in Kant's early natural philosophy. In the following, I will examine Kant's treatments of beauty and sublimity in his 1755 *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* and 1763 *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, i.e., the *Beweisgrund.* As I will aim to show, a proper consideration of these works will require us to moderate Guyer's claim that "an intimate connection between aesthetics and teleology" is "unprecedented in Kant's work" prior to the 1787 letter to Reinhold.[31] Moreover, while Guyer claims that Kant refers to the sublime "only rarely in the anthropology lectures," we will see that it played a pronounced role in Kant's early natural philosophy and that this early treatment of the sublime anticipates more of Kant's third *Critique* account than Guyer recognizes.[32] Appreciating these points will allow us to refine Guyer's picture of the third *Critique*'s novel innovations.

Guyer certainly acknowledges that Kant's general interest in questions regarding teleology are not new in the third *Critique*:

> By itself the idea that teleology might be a central part of philosophy is not new for Kant — in spite of his rejection of its traditional theological foundation in the argument from design, he had clearly been looking for a way to include teleology within his philosophy since his early work on *The Only Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763).[33]

However, Guyer does not seem to acknowledge a relationship between beauty and teleology in Kant's early thought. This is unfortunate, for, such a relationship is evident in both the *Universal Natural History* and *Beweisgrund*. These two works were published eight years apart, but there is considerable overlap in a number of their topics and themes. Indeed, the *Beweisgrund* even contains an abridged version of the *Universal Natural History's* cosmogony, which Kant included because the bankruptcy of the *Universal Natural History's* publisher had frustrated the earlier work's distribution. For these reasons, I consider these two works together below.

31 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 165.
32 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 185.
33 Guyer: "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality," 165.

The *Universal Natural History* primarily aims to explain the formation of solar systems and galaxies. In this work, Kant positions his own cosmogony in relation to Newton's natural philosophy. On the one hand, Kant is deeply influenced by Newton, as evidenced by the book's full title: *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens or Essay on the Constitution and the Mechanical Origin of the Whole Universe according to Newtonian Principles*.[34] On the other hand, the details of Kant's cosmogony differ significantly from Newton's own. Newton himself believed that particular features of our solar system (such as the fact that all of the planets are on a common orbital plane) could not be explained mechanically and must have required God's special intervention. Kant notes that for Newton "the direct hand of God had arranged this order without the application of the forces of nature."[35] In contrast to Newton, Kant aims to illustrate how our solar system, as well as the milky way and other solar systems and galaxies, could have arisen via merely mechanical laws from a prior state of chaotically swirling matter without a need for God's intervention.

It is important to recognize that part of the issue under consideration here was the formation of natural beauty. Indeed, Kant recognizes that people sympathetic to Newton's own position might worry that Kant's alternative explanation of "the beauty of the universe" tends towards atheism.[36] Voicing the fears of such potential critics, Kant writes:

> If the universe with all its order and beauty is merely an effect of matter left to its general laws of motion, if the blind mechanism of the powers of nature knows how to develop so magnificently and to such perfection all of its own accord: then the proof of the divine Author, which one derives from the sight of the beauty of the universe, is entirely stripped of its power, nature is sufficient in itself, divine government is superfluous, Epicure lives again in the middle of Christendom, and an unholy philosophy tramples faith under foot [...][37]

34 NTH, AA 01: 214: *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels oder Versuch von der Verfassung und dem mechanischen Ursprunge des ganzen Weltgebäudes, nach Newtonischen Grundsätzen abgehandelt*.

35 NTH, AA 01: 262.13–14: [...] die unmittelbare Hand Gottes habe diese Anordnung ohne die Anwendung der Kräfte der Natur ausgerichtet.

36 NTH, AA 01: 222.16 [...] der Schönheit des Weltgebäudes [...].

37 NTH, AA 01: 222.11–19: Wenn der Weltbau mit aller Ordnung und Schönheit nur eine Wirkung der ihren allgemeinen Bewegungsgesetzen überlassenen Materie ist, wenn die blinde Mechanik der Naturkräfte sich aus dem Chaos so herrlich zu entwickeln weiß und zu solcher Vollkommenheit von selber gelangt: so ist der Beweis des göttlichen Urhebers, den man aus dem Anblicke der Schönheit des Weltgebäudes zieht, völlig entkräftet, die Natur ist sich selbst genugsam, die göttliche Regierung ist unnöthig, Epikur lebt mitten im Christentume wieder auf, und eine unheilige Weltweisheit tritt den Glauben unter die Füße [...].

However, Kant pushes back against any such worry, maintaining that the existence of mechanical laws that allow matter to form itself into beautiful combinations out of chaos should actually be seen as evidence of God's existence:

> Matter, which is the original material of all things, is thus bound by certain laws, and if it is left free to these laws it must necessarily bring forth beautiful combinations. It is not at liberty to deviate from this plan of perfection. Since, therefore, it is subject to a most wise purpose, it must necessarily have been placed into such harmonious connections by a first cause that ruled over it, and *a God exists precisely because nature cannot behave in any way other than in a regular and orderly manner, even in chaos.*[38]

More specifically, Kant takes the fact that merely mechanical laws produce beautiful combinations to indicate that the essences of material things, which ground the mechanical laws, have their common ground in God. Kant writes:

> However, if one considers that nature and the eternal laws that are prescribed to substances for their interaction, are not a principle independent and necessary without God, that precisely because of the fact that it shows so much correspondence and order in what it produces through universal laws, we can see that the essences of all things must have their common origin in a certain primitive being and that for this reason they reveal many reciprocal relationships and much harmony because their properties have their source in a single highest understanding, whose sage idea designed them in constant proportions and implanted in them that ability by which they produce much beauty, much order in the state of activity if left to themselves, if, I say, one considers this, then nature will appear to us more dignified than it is commonly regarded and one will expect from its unfolding nothing but correspondence, nothing but order.[39]

---

38 NTH, AA 01: 228.03–11: Die Materie, die der Urstoff aller Dinge ist, ist also an gewisse Gesetze gebunden, welchen sie frei überlassen nothwendig schöne Verbindungen hervorbringen muß. Sie hat keine Freiheit von diesem Plane der Vollkommenheit abzuweichen. Da sie also sich einer höchst weisen Absicht unterworfen befindet, so muß sie nothwendig in solche übereinstimmende Verhältnisse durch eine über sie herrschende erste Ursache versetzt worden sein, und es ist *ein Gott eben deswegen, weil die Natur auch selbst im Chaos nicht anders als regelmäßig und ordentlich verfahren kann.*

39 NTH, AA 01: 332.20–35: Wenn man aber erwägt, daß die Natur und die ewigen Gesetze welche den Substanzen zu ihrer Wechselwirkung vorgeschrieben sind, kein selbständiges und ohne Gott nothwendiges Principium sei, daß eben dadurch, weil sie so viel Übereinstimmung und Ordnung in demjenigen zeigt, was sie durch allgemeine Gesetze hervorbringt, zu ersehen ist, daß die Wesen aller Dinge in einem gewissen Grundwesen ihren gemeinschaftlichen Ursprung haben müssen, und daß sie darum lauter gewechselte Beziehungen und lauter Harmonie zeigen, weil ihre Eigenschaften in einem einzigen höchsten Verstande ihre Quelle haben, dessen weise Idee sie in durchgängigen Beziehungen entworfen und ihnen diejenige Fähigkeit eingepflanzt hat, dadurch sie lauter Schönheit, lauter Ordnung in dem ihnen selbst gelassenen Zustande ihrer Wirksamkeit

Kant elaborates on and refines this idea in the *Beweisgrund*. This work is best known today for its *a priori* argument of God's existence. This argument, known as the modal argument, conceives of God as the ground of all possibility, arguing from the fact that things are possible to the existence of God. However, Kant spends much of the *Beweisgrund* relating this *a priori* argument's conception of God as the ground of possibility to natural philosophy. In light of the above passage from the *Universal Natural History*, this is not surprising, for Kant takes the *Beweisgrund*'s conception of God as the ground of all possibility entail the *Universal Natural History*'s conception of God as the common ground of the essences of all things. In regards to natural philosophy, the *Beweisgrund* pursues this picture in more detail as follows.

To begin, Kant notes that the existence of all finite things is contingent and that all finite things consequently depend on God's will for their creation. However, amongst created things, there are two types of natural order, which correspond to different ways that natural order can depend on God. These are contingent natural order and necessary natural order. Cases of contingent order depend on God's special institutions. Kant's primary example of such order is the order found in plants and animal bodies: "The creatures of the plant- and animal-kingdoms everywhere offer the most admirable examples of a unity which is at once contingent and yet in harmony with great wisdom."[40] According to Kant, merely mechanical laws cannot explain the formation of plant and animal bodies. The formation of such bodies relies, instead, on some special divine institution. Second, there is necessary natural order. This is order that arises from the essences of existing things without requiring any special institutions. Contrary to people like Newton, Kant takes the order of the solar system to be an instance of necessary natural order. Once God creates matter, it will operate according to merely mechanical laws and, in doing so, will form itself into solar systems like our own. However, these mechanical laws are grounded on the essence of matter, and the fact that the essences of things are even able to give rise to such order results from the fact that these essences depend on God, conceived as the ground of all possibility. There are, consequently, two different ways to argue from the order of nature to the existence of God. First, we can argue from the contingent order of nature to the existence of God, who has willed to specially

---

hervorbringen, wenn man, sage ich, dieses erwägt, so wird die Natur uns würdiger, als sie gemeiniglich angesehen wird, erscheinen, und man wird von ihren Auswickelungen nichts, als Übereinstimmung, nichts als Ordnung erwarten.

40 BDG, AA 02: 107.14–16: Die Geschöpfe des Pflanzen- und Thierreichs bieten durchgängig die bewundernswürdigste Beispiele einer zufälligen, aber mit großer Weisheit übereinstimmenden Einheit dar.

institute such order. Second, we can argue from the necessary order of nature to God who, as the ground of all possibility, grounds the essences of things.

Here we need to be careful. Initially, one might think that the distinction between these two types of order amounts to a distinction between order that involves divine teleology and order that does not involve any divine teleology. But this would be mistaken. While the case of contingent order clearly involves divine teleology, the case of necessary natural order does as well. In particular, Kant maintains that God chooses which particular things to create. This choice of particular things is based on God's recognition that the essences of these things will lead them to produce some specific natural order. Therefore, there is still a moment of divine choice and, correspondingly, divine teleology at play in the case of the necessary order of nature.

As we can see from the various passages quoted above, Kant's early natural philosophy closely associates beauty with concepts like order and harmony, often mentioning them together in a single breath, such that the *Beweisgrund*'s general discussion of natural order bears directly on natural beauty. In the *Beweisgrund,* Kant claims that beauty can belong either to the contingent order of nature or to the necessary order of nature. For instance, Kant refers to "the contingent beauties of nature."[41] But he also repeatedly emphasizes the beauty, including that of the solar system and galaxies, that results from merely mechanical laws and, therefore, belongs to the necessary order of nature. Additionally, Kant claims that beautiful geometric relations belong to the necessary order of nature, arousing emotions "in a manner similar to or even more sublime than that in which the contingent beauties of nature stir the feelings."[42] On Kant's view, these beautiful geometric relations obtain not merely because God has created space but because the very essence of space is grounded in God, as the ground of all possibility.

Kant takes all of these different types of natural beauty to provide evidence for the existence of God. Indeed, the *Beweisgrund* emphasizes the importance of arguments from the order, harmony, and beauty of nature to the existence of God. As noted previously, the *Beweisgrund* holds that we can demonstrate God's existence *a priori*. However, it also emphasizes the importance of sensible confirmation for rational *a priori* arguments, especially in a case of such significance as the existence of God, which bears on the momentous ethical concern of one's eternal happiness: "It is unlikely that anyone would venture his whole happiness upon the pretended

41 BDG, AA 02: 95.29: [...] die zufällige Schönheiten der Natur [...].

42 BDG, AA 02: 95.29–30: [...] auf eine ähnliche oder erhabnere Art wie die zufällige Schönheiten der Natur rühren. We might note that the beauty of geometric relations here seems to be a kind of intellectual beauty.

correctness of a metaphysical proof, especially if that proof were opposed by vivid objections which appealed to the senses."[43] Kant maintains that arguments from the order, harmony, and beauty of nature appeal to the senses and, as such, produce a conviction "so firm and unshakeable as to be unperturbed by any threats to it posed by syllogistic discourses and distinctions."[44] Moreover, Kant insists that this conviction is morally valuable because it helps to produce virtuous behavior in people. Referring to the conviction produced even by the common understanding's consideration of the contingent order of nature, Kant writes: "This conviction, in so far as it is supposed to be sufficient to produce virtuous behavior, that is to say, is supposed to be morally certain, can be arrived at by means of the ordinary concepts of the understanding."[45]

With these points in mind, we can see that an intimate connection between aesthetics and teleology, including moral teleology, was hardly unprecedented in Kant's thought prior to the third *Critique*. Kant's conception of the beauty that results from the necessary order of nature already anticipates to some extent the third *Critique*'s claims regarding the production of beauty via merely mechanical laws in §58's discussion of the idealism of purposiveness. But in Kant's early thought, the production of beauty via the necessary order of nature still relies on God's choice of which particular things (with their particular essences) to create and, thus, involves divine teleology; this point might be regarded as a partial forerunner of Kant's claim in the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment" that, once we reflectively adopt a teleological perspective on nature as a whole, we can reflectively judge even beautiful objects produced by mechanical laws as ends.[46] Moreover, in partial anticipation of the third *Critique*'s attempt to bridge the gulf between nature and freedom, Kant already recognized the need to make rational thoughts sensibly palpable and claimed that the consideration of natural beauty can help us in this regard. Kant even regarded the experience of natural beauty as morally significant, given that it leads to a conviction in God's existence that both promotes virtuous behavior and offers a promise of future happiness, partially

43 BDG, AA 02: 118.04–07: Schwerlich würde wohl jemand seine ganze Glückseligkeit auf die angemaßte Richtigkeit eines metaphysischen Beweises wagen, vornehmlich wenn ihm lebhafte sinnliche Überredungen entgegen ständen.

44 BDG, AA 02: 118.08–10: […] so gesetzt und unerschütterlich, daß sie keine Gefahr von Schlußreden und Unterscheidungen besorgt […].

45 BDG, AA 02: 116.26–28: […] es sind zu dieser Überzeugung, so fern sie zum tugendhaften Verhalten hinlänglich, das ist, moralisch gewiß sein soll, die gemeine Begriffe des Verstandes hinreichend.

46 KU, AA 05: 380:13–25. One might wonder how this aspect of Kant's view squares with his conception of beauty in terms of purposiveness without purpose, but I am not able to consider that further issue here.

anticipating the third *Critique*'s claim that people's consideration of natural beauty has "served admirably to strengthen that idea [...]" of God as the ground of the highest good.[47]

Yet, one thing missing from these early connections between aesthetics, teleology, and morality is any suggestion that beauty has some particularly special role to play in contrast to other related notions like order and harmony. I would suggest, then, that we amend Guyer's somewhat sweeping claim that a connection between aesthetics and teleology, including moral teleology, is unprecedented in Kant's thought prior to the third *Critique*. Rather, the truly innovative aspect of the third *Critique*'s approach to this relationship concerns the way in which Kant's mature aesthetic theory conceives of beauty specifically as providing a hint of nature's amenability to the realization of moral ends in the natural world. More specifically, Kant claims in §42 that we take a moral interest in natural beauty, because the precise way in which the pleasure of natural beauty parallels moral feeling provides a hint of nature's amenability to moral ends.[48] As Kant puts the point:

> But since it also interests reason that the ideas (for which it produces an immediate interest in the moral feeling) also have objective reality, i.e., that nature should at least show some trace or give a sign that it contains in itself some sort of ground for assuming a lawful correspondence of its products with our satisfaction that is independent of all interest [...] reason must take an interest in every manifestation in nature of a correspondence similar to this [...].[49]

This more specific claim, which relies on particular aspects of Kant's critical moral theory as well as Kant's mature aesthetic theory, does not appear anywhere in Kant's early natural philosophy.

47 KU, AA 05: 459.04.

48 One might take R 1820a from the 1770s to foreshadow this idea: "Beautiful things indicate that the human being belongs in the world. [Die Schöne Dinge zeigen an, daß der Mensch in die Welt passe.] [...]" (Refl, AA 16: 127). But this *Reflexion* does not actually mention morality.

49 KU, AA 05: 300.23–33: "Da es aber die Vernunft auch interessirt, daß die Ideen (für die sie im moralischen Gefühle ein unmittelbares Interesse bewirkt) auch objective Realität haben, d. i. daß die Natur wenigstens eine Spur zeige, oder einen Wink gebe, sie enthalte in sich irgend einen Grund, eine gesetzmäßige Übereinstimmung ihrer Producte zu unserm von allem Interesse unabhängigen Wohlgefallen [...] anzunehmen: so muß die Vernunft an jeder Äußerung der Natur von einer dieser ähnlichen Übereinstimmung ein Interesse nehmen [...].

4 The Sublime in Kant's Early Natural Philosophy

The sublime also plays a pronounced role in Kant's early natural philosophy. Kant explicitly refers to a "sublime view" of the cosmos, and many passages employ multiple tropes related to the 18th-century's general conception of the sublime, such as astonishment, eternity, hiddenness, infinity, the night sky, nobility, profundity, stillness, and so on.[50] Consider, for example, the closing lines of the *Universal Natural History*:

> Indeed, when one has filled one's mind with such observations and the preceding ones, the view of the starry sky on a clear night gives one a kind of pleasure that only noble souls feel. In the universal stillness of nature and the calmness of the senses the immortal spirit's hidden faculty of cognition speaks an ineffable language and provides undeveloped concepts that can certainly be felt but not described. If, among the thinking creatures of this planet, there are any despicable beings who, in spite of all the delights with which so great an object can attract them, are yet in a position to tie themselves firmly to the service of vanity, how unfortunate is this sphere that it has been able to bring up such miserable creatures! But how fortunate is it, on the other hand, because under the most acceptable of conditions a way has been opened for it to attain bliss and sublimity [*Hoheit*] that is exalted [*erhaben*] infinitely far above the benefits that the most advantageous arrangement of nature can attain in all celestial bodies![51]

It is, however, important to acknowledge that the line between the beautiful and the sublime is not always sharp in Kant's early writings. He sometimes seems to associate them with one another, such as when he writes: "By its immeasurable magnitude and by the infinite diversity and beauty that shines forth from it on all

50 NTH, AA 01: 253.20 [...] erhabene Vorstellung [...]

51 NTH, AA 01: 367.26–368.06: In der That wenn man mit solchen Betrachtungen und mit den vorhergehenden sein Gemüth erfüllt hat: so giebt der Anblick eines bestirnten Himmels bei einer heitern Nacht eine Art des Vergnügens, welches nur edle Seelen empfinden. Bei der allgemeinen Stille der Natur und der Ruhe der Sinne redet das verborgene Erkenntnißvermögen des unsterblichen Geistes eine unnennbare Sprache und giebt unausgewickelte Begriffe, die sich wohl empfinden, aber nicht beschreiben lassen. Wenn es unter den denkenden Geschöpfen dieses Planeten niederträchtige Wesen giebt, die ungeachtet aller Reizungen, womit ein so großer Gegenstand sie anlocken kann, dennoch im Stande sind, sich fest an die Dienstbarkeit der Eitelkeit zu heften: wie unglücklich ist diese Kugel, daß sie so elende Geschöpfe hat erziehen können! Wie glücklich aber ist sie andererseits, da ihr unter den allerannehmungswürdigsten Bedingungen ein Weg eröffnet ist, zu einer Glückseligkeit und Hoheit zu gelangen welche unendlich weit über die Vorzüge erhaben ist, die die allervortheilhafteste Einrichtung der Natur in allen Weltkörpern erreichen kann!

sides, the universe puts us into silent astonishment."[52] One might take this to be an example of what Kant in his 1764 *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, calls the magnificent sublime, where a sublime prospect includes a large array of beautiful objects.[53] But Kant also sometimes refers to the sublime as itself a type of beauty, such as when he writes: "However, the designation 'infinity' is beautiful and genuinely aesthetic. Extension beyond all numerical stirs the emotions, and, in virtue of a certain embarrassment which it causes, it fills the soul with astonishment."[54] Yet, given that a sharp distinction between the beautiful and the sublime arose only gradually in the 18th-century, Kant's early terminology is not unusual in this respect, and we can identify elements of Kant's early natural philosophy that clearly belong to the discourse of sublimity.[55]

Why exactly does Kant take his early picture of the universe to be sublime? To answer this question, we need to describe Kant's early picture in slightly more detail. As outlined above, the *Universal Natural History* aims to illustrate the formation of solar systems and galaxies by means of merely mechanical laws. But Kant's more detailed theory is as follows. At an earlier stage, the universe consisted of swirling matter distributed throughout infinite space. Given merely mechanical laws, this matter started to clump together into bodies, forming a large body around which other bodies rotated. This process continued, such that new solar systems and galaxies were formed. In fact, this process still continues today, with new solar systems and galaxies constantly being formed from the chaotic swirls of matter at the edge of the ordered cosmos. Yet, the same mechanical laws that give rise to solar systems and galaxies will also ultimately lead to their destruction. But given that solar systems and galaxies will arise from chaotic swirling matter via merely

52 NTH, AA 01: 306.16–18: Das Weltgebäude setzt durch seine unermeßliche Größe und durch die unendliche Mannigfaltigkeit und Schönheit, welche aus ihm von allen Seiten hervorleuchtet, in ein stilles Erstaunen.

53 Clewis, *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*, 163. Other 18th-century authors also allow for versions of this kind of sublimity. For instance, Burke, Edmund (2008, [1757]), *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 77, makes a similar point, referring specifically to beautiful stars in the night sky: "A great profusion of things, which are splendid or valuable in themselves is *magnificent*. The starry heaven, though it occurs so frequently to our view, never fails to excite an idea of grandeur."

54 BDG, AA 02: 154.19–22: Die Benennung der Unendlichkeit ist gleichwohl schön und eigentlich ästhetisch. Die Erweiterung über alle Zahlbegriffe rührt und setzt die Seele durch eine gewisse Verlegenheit in Erstaunen.

55 Monk, Samuel H. (1960 [1935]), *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England*, provides a discussion of this history, identifying Addison as the first person to clearly distinguish the sublime from the beautiful. Clewis, *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*, 157 notes that Baumgarten still regarded the sublime as a type of beauty.

mechanical laws, the chaos resulting from this destruction will lead in turn to the formation of new solar systems and galaxies, replacing the old ones. The infinite cosmos is, therefore, in a constant state of formation and destruction. Note that this picture of the universe contains the two elements that become key to the third *Critique*'s later distinction between the mathematical and dynamical sublime: namely, infinity and destructive power. Kant does not yet draw a clear distinction between the mathematical and dynamical sublime, but he definitely relates both these two elements to the feeling of sublimity. In regards to infinity, he writes:

> If the magnitude of a planetary system in which the earth is as a grain of sand and scarcely noticeable puts our reason into a state of wonderment, then with what amazement are we delighted when we contemplate the infinite multitude of worlds and systems that constitute the sum of the milky way; but how much does this amazement increase when one becomes aware that all these immeasurable orders of stars in turn are the unit of a number whose end we do not know, and which is perhaps just as inconceivably great as these and yet is in turn only the unit of a new combination of numbers.[56]

And Kant relates his conception of the universe as undergoing constant formation and destruction to the general notion of the sublime, writing: "[...] then the mind that contemplates all this sinks into a profound astonishment [...]"[57]

In the third *Critique*, Kant famously claims that the aesthetic experience of the sublime leads from our observation of enormous magnitude or destructive power to a consideration of our own reason. However, Kant's position differs in the earlier *Universal Natural History* and *Beweisgrund*. In the *Universal Natural History* he claims that our profound astonishment leads to the thought of God:

> [...] then the mind that contemplates all this sinks into a profound astonishment; and yet still unsatisfied with this so great object, whose transience cannot satisfy the soul sufficiently, he

56 NTH, AA 01: 256.02–11: Wenn die Größe eines planetischen Weltbaues, darin die Erde als ein Sandkorn kaum bemerkt wird, den Verstand in Verwunderung setzt, mit welchem Erstaunen wird man entzückt, wenn man die unendliche Menge Welten und Systemen ansieht, die den Inbegriff der Milchstraße erfüllen; allein wie vermehrt sich dieses Erstaunen, wenn man gewahr wird, daß alle diese unermeßliche Sternordnungen wiederum die Einheit von einer Zahl machen deren Ende wir nicht wissen, und die vielleicht eben so wie jene unbegreiflich groß und doch wiederum noch die Einheit einer neuen Zahlverbindung ist.

57 NTH, AA 01: 321.21–22: [...] so versenkt sich der Geist, der alles dieses überdenkt, in ein tiefes Erstaunen [...]

> wishes to get to know at close quarters that being whose understanding is the source of the light which spreads over all of nature as though from one centre point.[58]

In this general context, the *Beweisgrund* specifically singles out the sublimity of God's all-sufficiency:[59]

> The sum of all these reflections leads us to the concept of the Supreme Being. This Supreme Being embraces within itself everything which can be thought by man, when he, a creature made of dust, dares to cast a spying eye behind the curtain which veils from mortal eyes the mysteries of the inscrutable. God is all-sufficient. Whatever exists, whether it be possible or actual, is only something in so far as it is given through Him. If it be permitted to translate the communings of the Infinite with Himself into human language, we may imagine God addressing Himself in these terms: *I am from eternity to eternity: apart from me there is nothing, except it be through me*. This thought, of all thoughts the most sublime, is still widely neglected, and mostly not considered at all.[60]

Here Kant portrays God as all-sufficient, such that God does not depend on anything else, while all other things, including all possibilities, depend on God. As all-sufficient, God possesses a supreme type of independence. We should note Kant also refers to God in the above passage as the Infinite. But Kant clarifies that this is itself a poetic reference to God's all-sufficiency. He observes that the "concept of divine *all-sufficiency*, expanded to include all that is possible or real, is a far more appropriate expression for designating the supreme perfection of the Divine Being

---

58 NTH, AA 01: 321.21–26: [...] so versenkt sich der Geist, der alles dieses überdenkt, in ein tiefes Erstaunen; aber annoch mit diesem so großen Gegenstande unzufrieden, dessen Vergänglichkeit die Seele nicht gnugsam zufrieden stellen kann, wünscht er dasjenige Wesen von nahem kennen zu lernen, dessen Verstand, dessen Größe die Quelle desjenigen Lichtes ist, das sich über die gesammte Natur gleichsam als aus einem Mittelpunkte ausbreitet.

59 We might note that the following passage seems to anticipate the third *Critique*'s reference to the goddess Isis: "Perhaps nothing more sublime has ever been said, or any thought more sublimely expressed, than in the inscription over the temple of **Isis** (Mother **Nature**): 'I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and my veil no mortal has removed [Vielleicht ist nie etwas Erhabneres gesagt, oder ein Gedanke erhaben ausgedruckt worden, als in jener Aufschrift über dem Tempel der *Isis* (der Mutter *Natur*): 'Ich bin alles, was da ist, was da war, und was da sein wird, und meinen Schleier hat kein Sterblicher aufgedeckt]." (KU 05: 316.31–34).

60 BDG, AA 02: 151.05–15: Die Summe alle dieser Betrachtungen führt uns auf einen Begriff von dem höchsten Wesen, der alles in sich faßt, was man nur zu gedenken vermag, wenn Menschen, aus Staube gemacht, es wagen ausspähende Blicke hinter den Vorgang zu werfen, der die Geheimnisse des Unerforschlichen für erschaffene Augen verbirgt. Gott ist allgenugsam. Was da ist, es sei möglich oder wirklich, das ist nur etwas, in so fern es durch ihn gegeben ist. Eine menschliche Sprache kann den Unendlichen so zu sich selbst reden lassen: *Ich bin von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit, außer mir ist nichts, ohne in so fern es durch mich etwas ist*. Dieser Gedanke, der erhabenste unter allen, ist noch sehr vernachlässigt, oder mehrenteils gar nicht berührt worden.

than the concept of the *infinite*, which is commonly employed. For no matter how this latter concept be interpreted, its fundamental meaning is manifestly mathematical."[61] Here Kant notes that we cannot apply the mathematical concept 'infinite' to God in rigor, instead the term 'all-sufficient' (allgenugsam) "satisfies the demands of logical rigour to a greater degree."[62] But Kant still permits the use of the term 'infinite' here because (to repeat a passage quoted previously) it is "beautiful and genuinely aesthetic" as it "stirs the emotions, and in virtue of a certain embarrassment which it causes, it fills the soul with astonishment."[63] In other words, Kant describes God as infinite because that description helps to elicit a feeling of the sublimity of God's all-sufficiency — that is, of God's absolute independence.

While Kant here emphasizes a move from our observation of the cosmos to the thought of God's all-sufficiency, he also takes our observation of the cosmos to lead to the thought of our own immortality. More specifically, the destructive power of nature at play in the cosmos gives rise to a consideration of the transience of things and to our own natural mortality. This thought leads in turn to a consideration of the soul's immortality: "When the shackles that hold us to the vanity of creatures have fallen off at the moment that has been determined for the transfiguration of our being, then the immortal spirit, liberated from dependence on finite things, and in the company of the infinite being, will find the enjoyment of true happiness."[64] 18th-century authors often associated immortality with the sublime, as in the case of Edward Young's influential poem *The Complaint: or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality*. In the *Observations*, Kant himself states in passing that "the immortality of our soul" possesses "a certain sublimity and dignity," but he does not stop to explain why.[65] However, in the *Universal Natural History*, Kant associates the sublime with the notion of the immortal soul's liberation from a dependence on finite things:

61 BDG, AA 02: 154.04–09: Es ist auch dieser über alles Mögliche und Wirkliche erweiterte Begriff der göttlichen *Allgenugsamkeit* ein viel richtigerer Ausdruck, die größte Vollkommenheit dieses Wesens zu bezeichnen, als der des *Unendlichen*, dessen man sich gemeiniglich bedient. Denn ob man diesen letztern zwar auslegen kann, wie man will, so ist er seiner eigentlichen Bedeutung nach doch offenbar mathematisch.

62 BDG, AA 02: 154.23: […] der logischen Richtigkeit mehr angemessen.

63 BDG, AA 02: 154.20–22: […] schön und eigentlich ästhetisch […], […] rührt und setzt die Seele durch eine gewisse Verlegenheit in Erstaunen.

64 NTH, AA 01: 322.06–11: Wenn dann die Fesseln, welche uns an die Eitelkeit der Kreaturen geknüpft halten, in dem Augenblicke, welcher zu der Verwandlung unsers Wesens bestimmt worden, abgefallen sind, so wird der unsterbliche Geist, von der Abhängigkeit der endlichen Dinge befreit, in der Gemeinschaft mit dem unendlichen Wesen den Genuß der wahren Glückseligkeit finden.

65 BGSE, AA 02: 215.19–20: […] der Unsterblichkeit unserer Seele […] eine gewisse Erhabenheit und Würde.

> With what kind of reverence does not the soul have to regard even its own being, when it considers that it is to survive all these changes [...] O happy, if among the tumult of the elements and the ruins of nature, it is always positioned at a height from which it can see the devastations that frailty causes the things the world to rush past under its feet, so to speak! [...] The changeable scenes of nature are not capable of disturbing the peace of happiness of a spirit that has been raised to such heights... [*zu solcher Höhe erhoben ist*][66]

Here Kant refers to the soul's sublimity in terms of an elevation above the destructive power of nature, associating this elevation with a feeling of reverence [*Ehrfurcht*] to connote respect for the sublimity of one's immortal soul. These remarks further illustrate the extent to which Kant's early thought associates the sublime with independence, in this case the soul's independence from nature.[67] This concept of independence is the common link between Kant's characterizations of both God's all-sufficiency and the soul's immortality as sublime.

Guyer's interpretation of the anthropology lectures seems to suggest that most of the elements of Kant's mature theory of the sublime, such as the distinction between the mathematical and dynamical sublime, the relationship between reason and imagination, and the relevance of our own moral freedom, are late additions to Kant's aesthetic theory. However, our consideration of the sublime in Kant's early natural philosophy allows us to refine Guyer's interpretation. Although Kant's early thought does not draw a clear terminological distinction between the mathematical and dynamical sublime, it clearly deals with the sublime in the context of both infinity and destructive power.[68] Moreover, although Kant's early treatment of the sublime discusses neither theoretical nor practical reason's independence from sensibility (which is not surprising, given that Kant had not yet developed his critical conception of pure reason), it does already relate the notion of the sublime to the concept of independence, including our own independence from nature. The major shift in Kant's thought here between his early natural philosophy and the

66 NTH, 01: 321.26–322.19: Mit welcher Art der Ehrfurcht muß nicht die Seele sogar ihr eigen Wesen ansehen, wenn sie betrachtet, daß sie noch alle diese Veränderungen überleben soll [...] O glücklich, wenn sie unter dem Tumult der Elemente und den Trümmern der Natur jederzeit auf eine Höhe gesetzt ist, von da sie die Verheerungen, die die hinfälligkeit den Dingen der Welt verursacht, gleichsam unter ihren Füßen kann vorbei rauschen sehen! [...] Die veränderlichen Scenen der Natur vermögen nicht, den Ruhestand der Glückseligkeit eines Geistes zu verrücken, der einmal zu solcher Höhe erhoben ist.

67 Denker, Alfred (2001), "The Vocation of the Human Being: Kant's Early Practical Philosophy, 1747–1765," 132 briefly notes the importance of the soul's independence here but relates it simply to Kant's ethical, rather than aesthetic, concerns.

68 One might note that the *Observations* also refer to cases of infinity and power as sublime. But the central importance of these two specific elements is less clearly pronounced there.

third *Critique* seems to concern the specific type of independence at play, such that Kant moves from an emphasis on God's all-sufficiency and the independence of our immortal souls to a new emphasis on the independence of theoretical and practical reason from sensibility.[69]

5 Conclusion

Paul Guyer's work on Kant's aesthetics has deeply influenced our contemporary understanding of the third *Critique*. Over time, Guyer's approach to Kant's aesthetics has come to focus increasingly on the moral significance of Kant's aesthetics. I believe that Guyer is correct to highlight the importance of this aspect of Kant's third *Critique*, even if I have declined to weigh in on the question of whether it constituted Kant's primary motivation for writing the book. My main aim has been to illustrate that Guyer's interpretation of Kant's development should be supplemented by a serious consideration of Kant's treatment of aesthetic concepts like beauty and sublimity in his early natural philosophy. In doing so, I have argued that we need to refine Guyer's interpretation of the extent to which the relationship between aesthetics and teleology is new to Kant's thought in the third *Critique*. Additionally, I have attempted to show that the sublime plays a pronounced role in Kant's early natural philosophy and that Kant's early conception of the sublime already employs a concept of independence that foreshadows aspects of the third *Critique*'s own theory. I hope, however, that these refinements might be seen as friendly amendments to Guyer's overall interpretation that help put into relief the specifically new ways in which the third *Critique* comes to relate aesthetics, morality, and teleology to one another.[70]

69 Clewis, *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*, 178 and Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason*, 62 suggest that Kant shifts from a more theologically-oriented theory of the sublime to an emphasis on reason in the third *Critique*. But they do not draw attention to the specific importance of all-sufficiency as a kind of independence in Kant's early thought, and they do not analyze the sublimity of immortality in Kant's early thought. We should also note that the third *Critique* does not dismiss the concept of theological sublimity entirely; see KU, AA 05: 108.35. But the question of how exactly the third *Critique*'s references to God's sublimity relate to its mature theory of the sublime is not one that I can pursue here.

70 I would like to thank Robert Clewis for comments on this paper.

References

Burke, Edmund (2008 [1757]). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Milton Park, New York.

Clewis, Robert (2023). *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, New Delhi, Singapore.

Denker, Alfred (2001). "The Vocation of the Human Being: Kant's Early Practical Philosophy, 1747–1765." In *New Essays on the Precritical Kant*, ed. by Tom Rockmore, Amherst, NY.

Guyer, Paul (1977). *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Cambridge, MA.

Guyer, Paul (1993). *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne.

Guyer, Paul (2005a). *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*, New York.

Guyer, Paul (2005b). "Beauty, Freedom, and Morality: Kant's Lectures on Anthropology and the Development of his Aesthetic Theory." In *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*, New York.

Guyer, Paul (2014). *A History of Modern Aesthetics, Volume 1: The Eighteenth-Century*, Cambridge, New York, Port Melbourne, New Delhi, Singapore.

Kanterian, Edward (2018). *Kant, God, and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn*, Milton Park, New York.

Klemme, Heiner F. (2010). "The Origin and Aim of Kant's Critique of Practical Reason." In *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Andrews Reath and Jens Timmermann, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Capetown, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City.

Kuehn, Manfred (2001). *Kant: A Biography*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town.

Monk, Samuel H. (1960 [1935]). *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England*, Ann Arbor.

Schönfeld, Martin (2000). *The Philosophy of the Young Kant: The Precritical Project*, New York.

Shell, Susan Meld (1996). *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation, and Community*, Chicago.

Winegar, Reed (2017). "Kant and Hutcheson on Aesthetics and Teleology." In *Kant and the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by Elizabeth Robinson and Chris Surprenant, Milton Park.

Winegar, Reed (2021). "Kant's Antinomy of Taste and the Supersensible." In *The Court of Reason*. Akten des 13. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses (Oslo, 6. bis 9. August 2019), ed. by Camilla Serck-Hanssen and Beatrix Himmelmann, Berlin, Boston.