

I. Kant's (1724-1804) Transcendental Project: The Epistemic Critique of Metaphysics and the Harmonization of Modernist Rationalist and Empiricist Theories of Representation: Summary and Relevance to Islamic Philosophy—Part II: Moral Philosophy and Aesthetics

Prelude:

This short study focuses on Kant's practical philosophy and his closely connected theory of aesthetics. Kant initiates his moral theory in the *Critique of Practical Reason* with an argument for positive freedom. Kant deliberately chooses to talk about the rational foundation of positive freedom to prepare the readership of his critical project to his construction of the supersensible realm and its regulative application. In the Second Division of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant demonstrates how reason necessarily deduces three ideas as unconditioned conditions of all conditions: the theological idea (Ideal of God), the cosmological idea (idea of the world) and the psychological idea (idea of the self). While these ideas are necessary products of reason, they have no epistemic application. For Kant, as I explain, in Part I of this series of essays, epistemic claims are the product of the synthesis of the application of the twelve fundamental logical categories (Kant calls this application "the transcendental use of the categories") to empirical intuitions received from the senses. Kant argues that these ideas have other important regulative uses. Such uses are not, as many misrepresentations of Kant tend to depict his argument, subordinate to epistemic uses. As we shall see in this short analysis, Kant considers the moral and aesthetic domains as the truly human (*menschlich*) domains vis-à-vis the mechanically constructed, theoretical domain of Knowledge. Kant's systematic interest in limiting the domain of knowledge is motivated by his two-pronged desire to establish a rigorous basis for disagreement and falsification among scientists, on the one hand, and to safeguard against unlawful theological and moral imposition on knowledge or vice versa, on the other. In the 'Doctrine of Method' of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as in other parts of the first *Critique*, Kant talks about negative freedom. By negative freedom, Kant means that when we try to analyze human activity in space and time, all human sciences deal with human phenomena—be they psychological, sociological, political or anthropological—as phenomena in space and time. These phenomena are related to each other and are mechanically constructed according to the synthesis of the categories with space-time intuitions. All theoretical sciences use these categories; the difference among them consists of the emphasis on particular phenomena. For instance, psychology is interested in the causal connections between psychological states whereas sociology is concerned with causal connections between social phenomena. Both sciences would use categories to analyze different domains of phenomena. If this is the case, human phenomena would be mechanically constructed like any other object. However, Kant argues that despite the way we objectify ourselves, we still recognize that as conscious rational beings, we transcend the limitations of mechanical rules and have freedom. But we can only speak about such freedom in negation, i.e., by saying that we are not merely mechanical phenomena

constructed in consciousness through the synthesis of the categories with sensible intuitions.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant demonstrates how the domain of ideas allows us to be positively free in complete distinction from the domain of phenomena. In this context, he shows how such positive freedom is the foundation or the *causa noumenon* (the noumenal cause) of morality. However, because this morality and rational agency is totally transcendent to the phenomenal realm of space and time where humans live and interact, Kant runs into another dilemma. If the moral maxim or rules that define what actions ought to be taken in a specific situation—or the good—versus what actions must not be taken—or the evil—and these rules are decided intelligibly without any reference to any phenomena, and if these maxims are only on the level of intention and can have an influence (*Einfluss haben*), how can humans as moral agents see the effect of their actions on the world societally and environmentally? As Kant admits in the Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, the last work of his critical trilogy, morality, as it is constructed in the supersensible realm, and the empirical ego, as it is objectively constructed in theoretical consciousness, appear to be like ‘separate isles.’ Human subjectivity appears to be schizophrenic. How can any human rational agent harmonize his positive freedom, the basis of his actions, with his own perception of her/himself as a product of causal relations? This is where aesthetic consciousness becomes relevant and the relationship between morality and beauty becomes most crucial for Kant’s theory of subjectivity in general and his conception of self-consciousness in particular.

The first part of this essay outlines an overview of the fundamental arguments Kant gives for moral judgments focusing specifically on the analytic of practical reason in the second *Critique*. The second part of the essay furnishes a summary of Kant’s argument for aesthetic reflective judgment as the basis of *sensus communis* and the basis for harmonizing the supersensible with the sensible. This part will pay special attention to §59 of the ‘Critique of Aesthetic Judgment,’ titled ‘Beauty as a Symbol of Morality.’ The third part of the essay briefly investigates the critical relevance of Kant’s moral and aesthetic arguments for classical and post-classical Islamic philosophy and theology.

Part I: Kant’s Supersensible Moral Judgment: Positive Freedom and its Discontents

Practical principles are maxims, which are subjective “propositions which contain a general determination of the will, having under it several practical rules.” Kant’s morality, however, demands that these subjective maxims become objective laws, “valid for the will of every rational being.” This prevents the ground of pure practical reason from being any empirical object. Still, because practical principles are maxims, and as such subjective, “the principles which man makes for himself are not laws by which he is inexorably bound, because reason, in practice, has to do with a subject and especially with his faculty of desire, the special character of which may occasion variety in the rule.” Heteronomy of the will is the result. The problem of the heteronomy of the will is resolved because the will is determined by an *ought*. An ‘ought’ is an imperative. An imperative is more than a maxim because it is a rule which makes a claim to objective validity in determining the will. There are two kinds of imperatives, the hypothetical and

the categorical. The hypothetical imperative “contains only precepts of skill,” or efficient, natural causality. A categorical imperative, however, determines the will without regard to the result. It therefore has freedom as its sole cause. A categorical imperative is the only true imperative, as it is completely lawful, while hypothetical imperatives contain a pathological element, i.e., natural causality. Prudence and pleasure show the pathology of the hypothetical imperative, as it cannot be valid for everyone, because both seek realization in an object outside of the will. This presumes to satisfy the feeling of desire, and not the reason desire is based upon—freedom, pure practical reason—and ends in a kind of self-love. But, because self-love contradicts freedom, it contradicts the “self” which it attempts to satisfy, to “love.” Honesty, on the other hand, can be used to illustrate the categorical imperative because it effects only the will of the subject, and is addressed only to the preservation of freedom. There are two faculties of desire, the lower and the higher. These are higher order ways of thinking of the difference between the hypothetical and categorical imperatives, and how they relate to the will. The lower faculty of desire seeks three things—agreeableness, pleasure, and happiness—all of which are feelings, and which can only be known empirically. The higher faculty of desire seeks the form of pure reason, as pure practical reason. This is different from virtue as understood by the Greeks because the Greeks associated virtue with happiness. Kant holds that “reason determines the will in a practical law directly, not through an intervening feeling of pleasure or displeasure, even if this pleasure is taken in the law itself,” as it was in virtue. Kant does allow that “to be happy is necessarily the desire of every rational but finite being, and thus it is an unavoidable determinant of its faculty of desire.” However, precisely because we are finite beings, and not pure rational beings, our self-sufficiency is a problem for us, requiring us to consider our empirical needs, rather than our freedom in itself. This gives the pathological, empirical element a seat in the faculty of desire, leading to the heteronomy of the will—the difference between subjective and objective motives—and the virtual impossibility of happiness, insofar as we are finite beings. Our motives are therefore contingent and vary with our skill for realizing them. Advice can be offered to better these motives and to improve our skills, but this advice cannot obtain the status of law, as it is addressed to the particular subject, in a particular context. Counsels of advice have no objectivity or universality because “subjective conditions of choice must underlie them, and hence that they must be represented always as mere maxims and never as practical laws.” This seems to negate the possibility of pure practical reason for a human being.¹

Kant’s attempt to save practical laws is a complicated affair. Only universality justifies a practical law. Kant thinks that common moral understanding recognizes this. This is debatable, but regardless, it is important for Kant. It is the basis of that exceptions destroy a moral proposition. Kant concludes from this that the empirical grounds of decision—which are contingent, and thus admitting of exception—are not suitable grounds for moral, categorical imperatives. Categorical imperatives must be principles, and thus laws from which rules may be derived. They must be independent from contingency—the “natural law” of “appearances”—and this independence is *identical* with *transcendental freedom*. How is knowledge of freedom possible? Such knowledge

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy* (trans. Mary J. Gregor; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5:20-5.

would entail knowledge of the unconditioned, barred in the first critique. In pure practical reason, however, the unconditioned is not infinite thought, but the moral law. It implies no judgements regarding natural causality, so thought of the moral law does not succumb to transcendental illusion when deprived of empirical evidence. It is only concerned with the causality of freedom. And freedom attends to the necessary of its prescriptions, determining the will unconditionally. This amounts to consciousness and knowledge of the moral law. Thus, of a man we say “whether he would or not, he perhaps will not venture to say; but that it would be possible for him, he would certainly admit without hesitation. He judges, therefore, that he can do something because he knows that he ought to, and he recognizes that he is free—a fact which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.” Now, how can one “practice” this knowledge, which even the most common man has? *The fundamental law of pure practical reason is “so act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle giving universal law.”* This is how freedom gives the moral law. One acts *as if* one were a pure rational being. Again, this does not imply that it is possible to act “universally.” Such action is impossible for a finite, human being, and is only possible for a “holy will,” a will “incapable of any maxims which conflict with the moral law.” But the consciousness of this universal law, and recognition of its categorical imperative is a “fact of reason.” The source of this fact of reason is freedom, the originating law of morality, which is the moral law.²

The formal, categorical imperative of the moral law is expressed as an obligation, “the formal supreme determining of the will regardless of any subjective differences among men.” For human beings, acting out of obligation requires a certain degree of restraint on action, which makes it a duty “because a pathologically affected (though not pathologically determined—and thus still free) choice involves a wish arising from subjective causes and consequently such a choice involves a wish arising from subjective causes, and consequently, such a choice often opposes pure objective grounds of determination. Such a will is therefore in need of the moral constraint of the resistance offered by practical reason, which may be called an inner but intellectual compulsion.” This is the negative requirement of obligation. The positive element requires that the will strive for holiness, which is “a practical Idea which must necessarily serve as a model which all finite rational beings must strive toward even though they cannot reach it.” It strives for holiness by making “continuous progress” in universalizing its maxims. This striving is endless, infinite. Nevertheless, it is, for Kant, virtue itself. In its dedication to virtue and holiness, the will expresses its autonomy, which is opposed to its heteronomy. The human being is both autonomous and heteronomous. Freedom in the negative sense is independence from heteronomy, freedom in the positive sense is autonomy. “The moral law expresses nothing less than the autonomy of pure practical reason, i.e., autonomy.” This autonomy is qualified by the “material of volition,” human nature, however, and, as such “heteronomy of choice” and “dependence on natural laws in following some impulse or inclination” are produced. Some discussion of happiness and sympathy, and why they do not have the form of moral universality follows, most importantly with regards to responsibilities to others. Desire for the happiness of others

² Ibid., p. 5:25-7.

out of sympathy is not universalizable, but is universalizable taken as a universal, as in the kingdom of ends, as it is discussed in the *Groundwork*.

Kant turns from the question of the happiness of others to one's own happiness. Kant calls this, pejoratively, "self-love." He calls it a "practical conflict," insofar as it *advises*, but cannot *command*. It can *counsel* prudence, but not morality, which *commands* universally, without differentiating between oneself and another. Again, Kant defers to the common moral understanding to verify this. He reserves a place for prudence, as regards ultimate ends, but believes that duty is plain to everyone. "What duty is, is plain of itself to everyone, but what is to bring true, lasting advantage to our whole existence is veiled in impenetrable obscurity, and much prudence is required to adapt the practical rule based upon it even tolerably to the ends of life by making suitable exceptions to it. But the moral law commands the most unhesitating obedience from everyone; consequently, the decision as to what is to be done in accordance with it must not be so difficult that even the commonest and most unpracticed understanding without any worldly prudence should go wrong in making it." He even says "It is always in everyone's power to satisfy the commands of the categorical commands of morality; this is but seldom possible with respect to the empirically conditioned precept of happiness, and it is far from being possible, even in respect to a single purpose, for everyone." Kant discusses whether morality can be taught, and what constitutes justice, and the justice of punishment. These are often argued in a way that deprives subjects of freedom. Also, action is frequently thought to be determined by "moral sense" rather than reason. Kant contests this, on the grounds of causality. "One must already value the importance of what we call "duty," the respect for the moral law, and the immediate worth which a person obtains in his own eyes through obedience to it, in order to feel satisfaction in the consciousness of his conformity to the law or the bitter remorse which accompanies his awareness that he has transgressed it. *Therefore, the satisfaction or spiritual unrest cannot be felt prior to the knowledge of obligation, nor can it be made the basis of the latter.*" One must know morality in order to feel moral, essentially. The moral sense is something that should be cultivated, for the sake of duty, so that one can better fulfill one's duty. But this feeling and the abilities which arise from it come from duty, and not the other way around.³

The analytic has demonstrated the difference between perfection, in the practical sense, and empirical motivations of the will. Perfection can operate internally—in which case it is skill or talent—or externally, in which it is associated with the supreme perfection of substance, God, but pure practical reason brings these together, using action to fulfill the commands of external perfection, and in so doing, developing internal perfection along the endless path towards a unified perfection. Empirical and material principles cannot lead to any of these forms of perfection, as has been amply demonstrated by this analytic.

The analytic showed that pure reason could be practical, and that this was "inextricably bound up with consciousness of freedom." This means that pure practical reason succeeds where pure speculative reason failed. The moral law "does provide a fact

³ Ibid., p. 5:28-30.

absolutely inexplicable from any data of the world of sense or from the whole compass of the theoretical use of reason, and this fact points to a pure intelligible world—indeed, it defines it positively and enables us to know something of it, namely, a law.” This knowledge, insofar as it is the ground of action, makes it possible to give “the world of the senses, as sensuous nature (which concerns rational beings), the form of an intelligible world, i.e., the form of super-sensible nature, without interfering with the mechanism of sensuous nature.” The purpose of moral action is the transformation of nature. It tries to realize the “archetypical world,” the perfect world of the moral law, in the “ectypal world,” the world of sensuous nature. In realizing the “archetypical world,” reason brings forward the “highest good.” The highest good must be true, public, and the perfect Idea of a supersensible world.

The highest good is the principle from which all practical rules are derived. It is thus not an object which is the determining ground of the will, as it is for the understanding, but an Idea of pure practical reason. This Idea requires no *a priori* intuition. No such intuition is involved in determining the will, as the will is determined by the existence of an intelligible world, grounded in freedom. Curiously, Kant says that “freedom is necessary because those laws are necessary, being practical postulates.” There seems to be a certain degree of circular reasoning involved in this. Kant says this cannot be further explained, as “our human insight is at an end as soon as we arrive at fundamental powers or faculties, for their possibility can in no way be understood and yet should not be just arbitrarily imagined or assumed.” The ways in which the “faculty of freedom” is permissible as knowledge will take up a great deal of the rest of the critique. Fundamentally, it rests on the immanent, rather than transcendental use of freedom. This is how practical freedom is distinguished from cosmological freedom. Speculative reason cannot ascertain the difference when it attempts to validate the conditions of the possibility of freedom. Kant says it must “confess” as much. Freedom is not necessarily contradictory for speculative reason, but can never be understood positively, as it is in its immanent, practical use.⁴

An action is the object of pure practical reason. An action is the effect of the determination of the will. It is free of all empirical determinations, being the product of an *a priori* law. *Moral possibility* is the possibility of applying such an *a priori* law to a particular action. *Good* is the standard of moral possibility. *Evil* is moral impossibility. However, good and evil can only be “universally communicated” if they are distinguished from pleasure and pain. This distinction allows them to be judged by pure reason alone, whereas, where pleasure and pain are considered, empirical determinations come into play. These empirical determinations are “feelings.” They transform *good* into *usefulness* for the satisfaction of that feeling. It is clear in the German language, though not in Latin, that such conflation is ambiguous and inappropriate. Kant qualifies this with a delightful example. “When, however, someone who delights in annoying and vexing peace-loving folk receives at last a right good beating, the beating is certainly a bad thing, but everyone approves of it, and considers it as a good in itself even if nothing further results from it; nay, even he who gets the beating must acknowledge he sees the connection between and well-being and well-doing, which reason inevitably holds before

⁴ Ibid., p. 5:35-57.

him, here put into practice.” The point is that there is a certain *indirect*—meaning *analogical*—relation between pleasure and goodness and pain and evil. The relation is only indirect and can only be inferred by reason—Kant does not say which kind, theoretical or practical. If theoretical, it is subject to transcendental illusion. However, Kant implies that there is some “feeling” for it in the ordinary moral sense—based on moral faith—that would move this inference into the practical domain.

Any anthropological understanding of this feeling—as something in human nature—is a fiction. Feeling is something that belongs to the animal part of man. “That he has reason does not in the least raise him [man] above mere animality if reason serves only the purposes which, among animals, are taken care of by my instinct.” Moral feeling is what spurs a human being to consider more than his “weal and woe,” to use reason to universalize his maxim. Actions based on it are “not absolutely good but good only in relation to our sensuous being and its feeling of pleasure and displeasure.” The moral law is not defined by the good. Good is defined *a priori* by the moral law, as is evil. This raises a problem of method. Ancient philosophy showed itself confused by trying to derive something like the moral law from the concept of the good, generally derived from happiness. But good and evil are not categories, and happiness certainly is not. Good and evil are modes of causality, in particular, pure reason’s giving cause to itself, in the representation of the law of freedom. The importance of good and evil cannot be overstated, however. “The rules of practical reason are possible only with respect to events in the world of sense and consequently in accordance with the categories of the understanding.” This “accordance” is important for knowledge of pure practical reason, and actions determined through it. Pure practical reason produces “cognitions” whose reality it produces itself. However, as they take place in nature, these cognitions, and the actions determined through them, are only appearances. Their “inner nature,” as *causa noumenon*, does not appear. Thus, the transition from theoretical, natural concepts to the principles of pure practical reason remains *problematic*.⁵

This may be the most important section of the second critique. It deals with practical judgement. Practical judgement “applies what is asserted universally in the rule (*in abstracto*) to an action *in concreto*.” In the introduction to the third critique, Kant makes it clear that this is not a function of pure practical reason, but is a “corollary” of the understanding, calling it “technical,” and its problems a matter of “skill.” Still, it belongs in the domain of practical reason, if not of morality. The problem is that actions determined by the unconditional, universal moral law take place in the world of natural causality, sensuality, and feeling. No schemata can synthesize these two, as it did in the first critique. Schemata are transcendental, given by speculative reason. They function within cognition, inside the subject. But actions determined by the moral law have their effect outside the subject, as appearance. The point, however, is not the effect that the moral law has on the world of nature. Kant treats the efficacy of action as thoroughly inconsequential. The moral law only functions in the determination of the will. Its freedom is neither the sole nor the sum total of causality. A “type” of the moral law is like “the schema of a law itself.” It has the same form as the moral law, it is universal. “To the law of freedom (which is a causality not sensuously conditioned), and

⁵ Ibid., p. 5:58-67.

consequently to the concept of the absolutely good, no intuition and hence no schema can be supplied for the purpose of applying it *in concreto*. Thus, the moral law has no other cognitive faculty to mediate its application to objects of nature than the understanding (not the imagination); and the understanding can supply to an Idea of reason not a schema of sensibility but a law. This law, as one which can be exhibited *in concreto* in objects of the senses, is a natural law, but only in its form. This law can serve the purpose of the faculty of judgement, and it may, therefore be called the *type* of the moral law.” Any action, insofar as it has the form of the moral law, is a token of this type. This type is the universal, lawful order of freedom, about which nothing else can be known. Its absolute content is beyond our capacity to realize.⁶

It is important that Kant places real moral action in the domain of judgement. It is easy to see how the topic of pure practical reason avoids the excesses of empiricism—treating the moral law as merely a matter of custom—and mysticism—which, although it recognizes the sublimity of the pure moral law, fails to see that action in nature is an appearance, and cannot force the infinite into the finite, as later idealist and romantic philosophers would attempt to prove—ultimately showing moral action to be a *symbol* of the moral law.

Part II: Aesthetic Reflective Judgment: Purposiveness and ‘Beauty as a Symbol of Morality’

III. 1 Second Introduction (1793)

Kant initiates his second introduction with a taxonomy of philosophical questions; he writes: “Insofar as philosophy contains principles for the rational cognition of things through concept...it is usually divided into theoretical and practical.” In its own turn, that distinction depends on the concepts that assign to each realm of rational cognition its respective objective. These concepts are that of nature—for the theoretical part—and that of freedom, for the practical part. In this vein “concepts of nature make possible a theoretical cognition governed by *a priori* principles, whereas the very concept of freedom carries with it, as far as nature is concerned only a negative principle (namely of mere opposition) but gives rise to expansive principles for the determination of the will, the positive use of freedom as causal, that we get in the second *Critique*. Nonetheless, due to abuse of words, people failed to distinguish between what in practice is governed by concepts of nature and what in practice is governed by concepts of freedom. The former is designated as technically practical whereas the latter is described as morally practical. Technical, practical rules are properly called precepts; they are not laws since they are not merely in conformity with the laws of nature but are also subject to the concepts of freedom. These should not be taken as constitutive of a special part of philosophy in the same way as “solving the problems of pure geometry does not belong to a special part of geometry nor does the art of land surveying deserve the name of practical geometry.”⁷

⁶ Ibid., p. 5:67-71.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power Judgment* (trans.; New York: Cambridge University Press,), 5:171-4.

Kant starts the section by defining the domain proper of philosophy as “the range within which we can use our power of cognition according to principles, and hence do philosophy, is the range within which *a priori* concepts have application.” Now insofar as this application of concepts is concerned, Kant introduces the distinction between three levels of spheres of applicability: the realm, the territory, and the domain. These are respectively defined as follows: “Insofar as we refer concepts to objects without considering whether or not cognition of these objects is possible, they have their realm and this realm is determined merely by the relation that the object of these concepts has to our cognitive power in general”; “the part of this realm in which cognition is possible for us is a territory for these concepts and the cognitive power we need for such cognition”; and “the part of the territory over which these concepts legislate is the domain of these concepts and the cognitive powers pertaining to them.” For instance, empirical concepts do have their territory in nature, but there is no domain reserved for the pure concepts of the understanding or the categories. Cognitive power as a whole has two domains: that of the concepts of nature and that of the concept of freedom “because it legislates *a priori* by means of both kinds of concepts.”⁸

Yet despite the fact that both of them are independent of each other, both of them seem to need some sort of a connection. For while the domain of the concept of nature, the domain of the sensible, does not affect the supersensible domain of freedom, the latter must have an influence on the former “i.e., the concept of freedom is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws.” So, there must be some principle *a priori* that connects both of these domains. Kant then characterizes the *Critique of Judgment* as mediating the connection of the two parts of philosophy to form a whole. He writes: “the family of our higher cognitive powers also includes a mediating link between understanding and reason. This is judgment” ...which may itself have principles of its own *a priori*. In turn, this distinction also matches the division of the powers of the soul into the cognitive power, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure and the power of desire: “Hence we must suppose at least, provisionally, that judgment also contains an *a priori* principle of its own, and also suppose that since the power of desire is necessarily connected with pleasure or displeasure, judgment will bring about a transition from the domain of the concept of nature to the domain of the concept of freedom, just as in its logical use it makes possible the transitions from understanding to reason.”⁹

Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal is given, this would be determinative judgment yet if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely reflective. Now determinative judgments under universal transcendental laws given by the understanding are only subsumptive. Yet nature is diversified that and so there arises a need to bring and establish the necessity of the variegated forms of the laws of nature; the principle that could establish such necessity is that of purposiveness.

⁸ Ibid., p. 5:174-5.

⁹ Ibid., p. 5:175-9.

III. 2 Critique of Aesthetic Judgment

Kant starts his analysis of the Aesthetic reflective judgments by establishing why judgments of taste are Aesthetic to justify the legitimacy of his choice of it as a case study of Aesthetic and so reflective judgments—since he had already shown that reflective judgments that hinge on the principle of purposiveness have one of two presentations; either Aesthetic or Logical. To do so, he writes “If we wish to decide whether something is beautiful or not, we do not use understanding to refer the presentation to the object so as to give rise to cognition; rather, we use imagination to refer the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure and displeasure.” Thus, the determining basis of this judgment cannot be other than subjective. This kind of judging thus “does not contribute anything to cognition, but merely compares the given presentation in the subject with the entire presentational power of which the mind becomes conscious when it feels its own state.” The liking that determines the judgment of taste is devoid of all interest: “Interest is what we call the liking we connect with the presentation of an object’s existence. Hence, such liking always refers at once to our power of desire, either as the basis that determines it or, at any rate, as necessarily connected with that determining basis.” The question about beauty is not concerned with my interest in the object of which I predicate beauty; when someone is inquiring about whether or not I think that something is beautiful, he is mainly concerned with “whether my mere presentation of the object is accompanied by a liking no matter how indifferent I may be about the existence of the object of this presentation. We can easily see that in order for me to say that an object is beautiful and to prove that I have taste, what matters is what I do with this presentation within myself, and not the respect in which I depend on the object’s existence”.¹⁰

Kant then turns to the distinction between the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘agreeable.’ Kant starts the section with the definition of what is to become the first of the three sorts of liking: The Agreeable. He writes “Agreeable is what the senses like in sensation”: “When something determines the feeling of pleasure or displeasure and this determination of that feeling is called sensation, this term means something quite different from what it means when I apply it to the presentation of a thing through senses, a receptivity that belongs to the cognitive powers, for in the second case the presentation is referred to the object, but in the first it is referred solely to the subject, and is not used for cognition at all, not even for that by which the subject cognizes himself.” In light of that, Kant continues by saying that “the green color of meadows belongs to objective sensation, i.e., to the perception of an object of sense; but the color’s agreeableness belongs to subjective sensation, to feeling, through which no object is presented but through which the object is regarded as an object of our liking.” Thus, Kant argues “that judgment by which I declare an object to be agreeable expresses an interest in that object ...it presupposes that I have referred the existence of the object to my state insofar as that state is affected by such an object. This is why we say of the agreeable not merely that we like it, but that it gratifies us. When I

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5:203-5.

speak of the agreeable, I am not granting mere approval: the agreeable produces an inclination".¹¹

Subsequently, Kant discusses the second kind or sort of liking, viz. the Good, which he defines as "what by means of reason we like through mere concept. We call something good for if we like it only as means—and so would pertain to hypothetical imperative and the sphere of what is technically practical—But we call something intrinsically good if we like it for its own sake. In both senses, the term good always contains the concept of a purpose, consequently a relation of reason to volition, and hence a liking for the existence of an object or action. In other words, it contains some interest or other." The question is as to how this determination of the good is possible and how that in its own turn differs from the agreeable. Here, Kant writes "In order to consider something good, I must always know what sort of thing the object is [meant] to be, i.e., I must have a determinate concept of it. But I do not need this in order to find beauty in something. Flowers, free designs, lies aimlessly intertwined and called foliage: these have no significance, depend on no determinate concept, and yet we like them. A liking for the beautiful must depend on reflection regarding an object, that leads to some concept or other (but it is indeterminate which concept of this is)" [thus beauty is a liking in between arising from the conceptually indeterminate sensual influence of the agreeable and the conceptually determinate interest in the good].¹²

Subsequently, Kant spends time articulating and stressing the distinction between the agreeable and the good: "Insofar as we present an object as agreeable, we present it solely in relation to sense; but if we are to call the object good, and hence an object of the will, we must first bring it under principles of reason, using the concept of purpose... This is evident from the fact that in the case of the good there is always the question whether it is good merely indirectly or directly (i.e., useful, or intrinsically good) whereas in the case of the agreeable, this question cannot even arise, since this word always signifies something that we like directly." Kant then gives an example to highlight this distinction: "If a dish stimulates our tasting by its spices and other condiments, we will not hesitate to call it agreeable while granting at the same time that it is not good; for while the dish is directly appealing to our senses, we dislike it indirectly, i.e., as considered by reason, which looks ahead to the consequences".¹³

The Comparison of the three sorts of liking which differ in kind. Kant starts the section by an outline description of the difference among the three sorts of liking: "the agreeable a liking that is conditioned pathologically by stimuli, the good a pure practical liking that is determined not just by the presentation of the object, but also by the presentation of the subject's connection with the existence of the object, i.e., what we like is not just the object, but its existence as well. A judgment of taste, on the other hand, is merely contemplative, i.e., it is a judgment that is indifferent to the existence of the object: it considers the character of the object only by holding it up to our feeling of pleasure and displeasure. Nor is this contemplation, as such, directed to concepts, for a judgment of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 5:206-7.

¹² Ibid., p. 5:207.

¹³ Ibid., p. 5:208.

taste is not a cognitive judgment (whether theoretical or practical) and hence, is neither based on concepts nor direct to them as purposes.” Accordingly, we may say that there are three kinds of liking, only the liking involved in taste for the beautiful is disinterested and free, since we are not compelled to give our approval by any interest, whether of sense or of reason. So, we might say that the term liking, in the three cases mentioned refers to inclination, or to favor, or to respect.” [the agreeable, the beautiful and the good, respectively]. Explication of the beautiful inferred from the first moment—Taste is the ability to judge an object or a way of presenting it by means of liking or disliking devoid of all interest. The object of such liking is the beautiful.¹⁴

The beautiful is what is presented without concepts as the object of universal liking. Here, Kant introduces the universality character of the judgments of taste: “the explication of the beautiful can be inferred from the preceding explication of it as an object of a liking devoid of all interest. For if someone likes something and is conscious that he himself does so without any interest, then he cannot help judging that it must contain a basis for being liked for everyone. He must be justified in requiring a similar liking from everyone because he cannot discover, underlying this liking, a private condition which only he might be dependent so that he must regard it as based on what he can presuppose in everyone else as well.” Accordingly, the one making the judgment will talk about it as if it were a logical judgment related to the concept of the object even though it is not “for from concepts there is no transition to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure (except in pure practical laws; but these carry an interest in them, while none is concerned with pure judgment of taste).” Kant compares the beautiful with the agreeable and the Good in terms of the above characteristic. The Agreeable is always so to me... “Hence, about the agreeable the following principle holds: Everyone has his own taste.” He further argues: “But if someone proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others; he then judges not just for himself but for everyone and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things.” Thus, even if somebody claimed universality to a judgment about an agreeable thing, this universality is to be understood as only “...comparative, so that the rules are only general as all empirical rules are not universal as are the rules that a judgment about the beautiful presupposes or lays claim to”.¹⁵

Kant resumes his discussion of the peculiar universality of the judgments of taste: “Here we must not...that a universality that does not rest on concepts of the object (not even empirical ones) is not a logical universality at all, but an aesthetic one, i.e., the universal quantity of the judgment is not objective but only subjective. For this quantity I use the expression general validity, by which I mean the validity that a presentation’s reference to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure may have for every subject, rather than the validity of a presentation reference to the cognitive power. (We may, alternatively, use just one expression, universal validity, for both the aesthetic and the logical quantity of judgment, provided we add objective for the logical universal validity to distinguish it from the merely subjective one which is always aesthetic)”. Despite the fact that aesthetic judgments are singular ones, they can be turned into a concept by

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 209-10.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 211-13.

comparing them with other presentations [like judgments about roses]. Based upon this argument, Kant concludes that “nothing is postulated in a judgment of taste except such a universal voice about a liking unmediated by concepts. Hence, all that is postulated is the possibility of judgment that is aesthetic and yet can be considered valid for everyone. The judgment of taste itself does not postulate everyone’s...; it merely requires this agreement from everyone, as an instance of the rule, an instance regarding which it expects confirmation not from concepts, but from the agreement of others. Hence, the universal voice is only an *idea*”.¹⁶

Investigation of the question of whether in a judgment of taste, the feeling of pleasure precedes the judging of the object or the judging precedes pleasure. The pleasure in the given object became first, and our judgment of taste were to attribute only the pleasure’s universal communicability to the presentation of the object, then this procedure would be self-contradictory. For that kind of pleasure would be none other than mere agreeableness in the sensation, so that by its very nature it could only have private validity because it would depend on the presentation by which the object is given. Hence, it must be the universal communicability of the mental state, in the given presentation, which underlies the judgment of taste as its subjective condition, and the pleasure in the object must be its consequence. [this is the condition of the subjective universality of the judgments of taste.] Yet, “nothing...can be communicated universally except cognition, as well as presentation insofar as it pertains to cognition, and only through this does it have a universal reference point with which everyone’s presentational power is compelled to harmonize.” Accordingly, and if we still want to maintain the subjective basis of the universal communicability of the judgments of taste, this basis has to be “nothing other than the mental state that we find in the relation between the presentational powers [imagination and understanding] insofar as they refer a given presentation to cognition in general....When this happens, the cognitive powers brought into play by this presentation are in free play because no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition. Hence the mental state in this presentation must be a feeling accompanying the given presentation, of a free play of the presentational powers directed to cognition in general. Now if a presentation by which an object is given is to become cognition, we need imagination to combine the manifold of intuition, and understanding to provide the unity of the concept uniting the component presentations. This state of free play of the cognitive powers, accompanying a presentation by which an object is given, must be universally communicable; for cognition, the determination of the object with which given presentation are to harmonize (in any subject whatsoever) is the only way of presenting that holds for everyone.” [what I take Kant to be saying here is that since whatever is communicable has to be related to cognition, and since beauty cannot be related to cognition as such—as it is produced by the subsumption of intuitions under concepts—then what is left is the mental state accompanying the free play of the presentation powers, since these powers are basis of cognition that *is* common to everyone].¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 5:214-16.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5:218.

Kant then further explicates what he means by saying “for we are conscious that this subjective relation suitable for cognition in general must hold just as much for everyone, and hence, be just as universally communicable, as any determinate cognition, since cognition always rests on that relation as its subjective condition.” Kant restates the concept of purpose in quite an Aristotelian manner by saying “a purpose is the object of a concept insofar as we regard this concept as the object’s cause (the real basis of its possibility); and the causality that a concept has with regard to its object is purposiveness.” Kant further contends that “We think of a purpose if we think not merely, say of our cognition of the object but instead of the object itself, its form, or its existence, as an effect that is possible only through a concept of that effect. In that case, the presentation of the effect is the basis that determines the effect’s cause and precedes it.” Furthermore, he writes: “The power of desire insofar as it can be determined to act only by concepts i.e., in conformity with the presentation of a purpose, would be will. On the other hand, we do call objects, states of mind, or acts purposive even if their possibility does not necessarily presuppose the presentation of a purpose; we do this merely because we can explain and grasp them only if we assume that they are based on causality according to purposes, i.e., on a will that would have so arranged them in accordance with the presentation of a certain rule. Hence, there can be purposiveness without a purpose, insofar as we do not posit the causes of this form in a will and yet can grasp the explanation of its possibility only by deriving it from a will” [this is why at the beginning of this section he said that the aesthetic judgment is *leading* towards a concept.] Kant concludes that a judgment of taste is based on nothing but the form of purposiveness of an object or of the way of presenting it. The judgment of taste cannot be based either on a subjective external purpose, as in the case of agreeableness, nor on an objective internal purpose, as is the case of the good, since it is not cognitive. Accordingly, “the liking that without a concept we judge to be universally communicable and hence to be the basis that determines a judgment of taste, can be nothing but the subjective purposiveness in the presentation of an object, without any purpose (whether subjective or objective) and hence, the mere form of purposiveness, insofar as we are conscious of it, in the presentation by which an object is given us”.¹⁸

Part IV: The Relevance of Kant’s Argument for Scholars of Classical and Post-Classical Islamic Philosophy:

Little if any scholarship exists on the extensively longstanding Islamic tradition on beauty (*ḥusn*) and ugliness (*qubḥ*). These two aesthetic rational categories were systematically used in principles of Islamic law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and Islamic philosophical theology (*kalām*). The determination of them as rational origins was one of the key debates among Mu‘tazalī and Ash‘arī thinkers alike. The latter agreed that these are rational categories determined by God and that humans can rationally deduce maxims of actions according to the five modal categories (of the obligatory, prohibited, permissible, recommended, and disliked) based on their determination. The former argued that these principles are rational and that since their principle (*arche/aṣl*) is reason, humans can have access to their justification in line with the famous five Mu‘tazalī principles with God’s justice at the heart of this. This view had major implications for the connection between aesthetic

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5:219-21.

and moral judgments. Similarly, the connection between the moral and the aesthetic is found among key thinkers who influenced Sufism and particularly philosophical Sufism. Consider for example the discussion of reason as a foundation for moral and aesthetic judgments in al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī's *al-'Aql wa Fahm al-Qur'an*.