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SGIR Review

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Table of Contents

Prefaceii

SGIR Author-Meets-Critics Book Symposium, 2018 Pacific APA:

1. Kristin Gjesdal, *Herder’s Hermeneutics: History, Poetry, Enlightenment*, reviewed by
Karl Ameriks..... 1

2. Kristin Gjesdal, *Herder’s Hermeneutics: History, Poetry, Enlightenment*, reviewed by
Anne Pollok13

3. Herder’s Hermeneutics: Reply to Anne Pollok and Karl Ameriks, author response by
Kristin Gjesdal27

SGIR Author-Meets-Critics Book Symposium, 2018 Central APA:

4. Michel Chaouli, *Thinking with Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, reviewed by
Katalin Makkai.....40

5. Michel Chaouli, *Thinking with Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, reviewed by
Joseph J. Tinguely.....51

6. Between Passivity and Activity: Reply to Katalin Makkai and Joseph Tinguely by
Michel Chaouli.....67

Gjesdal, Kristin

Herder's Hermeneutics: History, Poetry, Enlightenment

Kristin Gjesdal. *Herder's Hermeneutics: History, Poetry, Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 232pp., US \$99.99, ISBN 9781316285770.

Reviewed by Karl Ameriks, University of Notre Dame

Kristin Gjesdal's book—with a full title in which each word carries considerable significance—is a major contribution to the growing philosophical literature that is finally granting Herder recognition as a major Enlightenment philosopher. The work of scholars such as Beiser, Forster, Heinz, Norton, Zammito, Zuckert, and others has finally corrected, at least in the professional literature, Isaiah Berlin's association of Herder with the so-called "Counter-Enlightenment." In building on, and often critically moving beyond their insights, Gjesdal makes a wise choice in not aiming to survey the full breadth of Herder's astoundingly varied writings. Although hermeneutics as such is her main topic, she is not concerned with the full literary and theological complexity of Herder's hermeneutical work but concentrates on the directly philosophical implications of his early period, the 1760s and 1770s. This narrowing of focus fits in with her own interest in defending a contemporary philosophical approach that is thoroughly hermeneutical, albeit in a sense that—as she stresses—contrasts with the non-Enlightenment features of the work of other well-known advocates of hermeneutics such as Hans-Georg Gadamer.¹ Perhaps her most important point—and one that I thoroughly agree with—is that, in concentrating progressively on late modern aesthetic issues such as the phenomenon of change of taste, Herder was by no means taking a detour into peripheral topics but was perceptively showing the way to how philosophy, through a hermeneutical concern with the issue of human nature, can be most valuable in our time.

Gjesdal also repeatedly takes note of the fact that Herder's ideas overlap in many positive ways with Kant's early philosophy. Herder quickly became Kant's most famous student and built

¹ See also Gjesdal (2009).

very creatively on the rich empirical information featured in Kant's first years as a lecturer, a period marked by what Günter Zöller has called Kant's invention of the discipline of "geo-anthropology."² But Herder also quickly moved beyond Kant by immediately placing even more emphasis on history and the phenomenon of change in worldview. Ever since, the Idealist tradition in Germany has been characterized by a contrast between the largely a priori and Newtonian orientation of Kant's Critical system, and the more organic and history-oriented work of Herder-influenced figures such as Schelling and Hegel.

Gjesdal characterizes in impressive scholarly detail what she calls Herder's revolutionary anthropological and "historical turn" (48) beyond Kant.³ In moving on to philosophically assess this turn, it is only natural to begin by working out a comparison and contrast with Kant's philosophy. I happen to have sketched out my own way of making this contrast in *Kant and the Historical Turn: Philosophy as Critical Interpretation* (which is not about a historical turn in Kant's work but about a contrast between Kant and what I call the "historical turn" in later philosophy) as well as in a recent essay on Kant's 1780s reviews of Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of History of Humanity*, and in several writings on Karl Reinhold, a pivotal Jena figure who provoked the post-Kantian Idealist movement by initially attempting a synthesis of Herder's and Kant's approaches.⁴ Gjesdal's work provides an ideal opportunity to revisit this topic now by reflecting on some of the key distinctions that arise in her interpretation. She begins by making a convincing proposal that Herder's turn should be understood as part of a philosophical hermeneutical project and not—as some have thought—as a move to make anthropology and related empirical studies a substitute for philosophy (7). She notes, however, that, unlike what happens in Kant's philosophy, for Herder "reflection must take place within a given cultural and historical context and not proceed by reference to the a priori conditions for subjectivity, experience and judgment" (3).

² Zöller (2013).

³ Gjesdal also seems very much in sympathy with this turn, even though she does not express as radical a preference for Herder as can be found, for example, in Zammito's and Forster's work.

⁴ See Ameriks (2006), (2012b), chs. 10 and 13-15; as well as (2005), (2014), and (forthcoming).

Here one can ask whether this demand is to be understood, first, very broadly as a universal demand that philosophical reflection should not bother anywhere with “a priori conditions.” Herder’s relentless attacks on the abstractions of traditional philosophy often do suggest such a radical demand. Of course, one might take the limitation on reflection, secondly, in a very narrow way, that is, as a proposal merely concerning how to carry out the empirical core of cultural studies. But this is an innocuously narrow limitation, because culture is obviously an empirical phenomenon, and hence—as even philosophers who are otherwise quite interested in the a priori can easily concede—it is something that, in its empirical detail, needs to be studied empirically. One can also propose, thirdly and more interestingly, a not so narrow limitation that might seem to be Herder’s main concern and is still specifically about culture. This would be an insistence not only of the claim that the specific empirical data of culture needs to be approached empirically, but also that it is important for philosophy never to go on to lay claim—as, for example, Dilthey and Husserl do—to the determination of any kind of a priori features of something like cultural “space” in general.

Given this specific limitation, there still could be something called a philosophy of culture, but it would be little more than a matter of making, at a second circumspective level, what are just empirical generalizations concerning information gathered at a crude, first empirical level. The initial presentation of Herder’s own position, quoted above, makes it appear as if, along these lines, he was committed to endorsing both the broad universal proscription—no a priori claims anywhere in philosophy!—and also, with special emphasis, the narrower demand: no a priori claims concerning fields such as culture, not even at a second, reflective level! Gjesdal’s ultimate defense of the distinctive project of hermeneutical philosophy, however, is more moderate and more appealing. It argues that the prime value of Herder’s work goes far beyond the generalizations of empiricism, or even interpretations that just amount to particular claims about striking cultural phenomena, for example, that Shakespeare’s plays reflect the special open character of English life in the modern age, in contrast to the relatively fixed setting of ancient drama (135). More positively, she argues that the best way to read Herder’s work philosophically is as supporting the view that, along with sensitive first-level interpretations, there can arise a global perspective-altering second-level insight into the general character of

proper hermeneutical orientation. This is the fundamental Herderian insight that, as interpreters, we always need to appreciate the unique sense that each work has within its own particular context (96) as well as in view of a general realization that cultural contexts significantly differ over space and time. This realization is a claim about deep diversity in the empirical world of culture, but it appears to be understood now as a certain philosophical thesis that is more than a probabilistic inductive result. It implies a constitutive claim, with many normative implications, about the very structure of human society and understanding, given that we are finite, earthbound creatures “caught in the throng”⁵ of a highly dynamic nature.

A similar characterization may be appropriate for another of Herder’s fundamental positions, namely that, as the modern period has played itself out, we have come to recognize our basic reflective limits,⁶ and learned that “philosophy can no longer be a quest for eternal and universal truth” (9). This point may sound at first like the mere recognition of a particular historical event, but its meaning goes far beyond that. It suggests a commitment to a philosophical claim that seems presented, paradoxically, as an eternal and universal truth, namely that philosophy, as a human enterprise carried out by finite language and nature and culture-bound agents, is in principle incapable of discovering eternal and universal truth. The claim, surely, is not that, once upon a time, philosophers were making this kind of discovery, and then in our era we have somehow lost the capacity; rather, what has happened, presumably, is that we have learned that the very notion of such a discovery by us is incoherent.

It is helpful to escape the paradox of this formulation by retreating to what can be called a hermeneutical reduction to the metalevel. The corrected and limited Herderian claim would then

⁵ Herder (1985), VI, 26, cited by Gjesdal (11 n 45). Gjesdal does not note that Herder’s insistence here is probably a non-accidental parallel to one of Kant’s earliest points, namely, that we should first determine what really “can be done” before we preach about what “ought” to be done. See e.g., Kant (1997), 42 (AA 27: 244).

⁶ “Herder surmises that the modern period starts with the experience—the hermeneutic challenge, we could say—of the human being realizing its limits” (9). In a footnote to this comment, Gjesdal mentions Herder’s relations to some ideas of Thomas Abbt, about taking responsibility for oneself, but it can be argued that the themes of taking responsibility and recognizing limits were already impressed upon Herder in Kant’s lectures. It is important to note also that for Kant the main limits, given our sensible nature, are on our certain *theoretical knowledge*, and these are not meant—as is all too often forgotten—as absolute limits on our practice, faith, or thought. In his own way, Herder also accepts a duality of the knowable and the merely believable (and divine), but Kant’s objection to Herder in his reviews is not so much a general point about empiricism or metaphysics but a concern that Herder encourages the thought that simply looking at nature in a dynamic, holistic, and theoretical (rather than “pure practical”) way is enough to warrant the exuberant providential optimism of the *Ideas*.

be that philosophy about “first-level” topics cannot establish eternal and universal truths, but there can be significant metaphilosophical claims, which are eternal and certain, about the limits of our intellect.⁷ Phrased in these terms, Herder’s position does sound consistent and, in an important sense, more than merely empiricist after all. Moreover, as Gjesdal notes, it would in general be a mistake for a Kantian to immediately suppose that anyone, in stressing a historical rather than a specifically transcendental approach, must immediately be taken to be merely an empiricist (48 and 176, n72). There are, nonetheless, some complications still to be sorted out. Recall that Gjesdal’s initial Herderian thesis—a thesis that has become enormously influential in our time through the indirect influence of Herderians such as many of Hegel’s followers—seemed to be saying that reflection should be historical and context sensitive and never proceed transcendently, that is, not “by reference to the a priori conditions for subjectivity, experience, and judgment.” One kind of Kantian rejoinder to this claim is precisely that a systematic study of “subjectivity, experience, and judgment” reveals the most significant limits of philosophical reason, and that it does so transcendently, that is, by showing the conditions of the very possibility of a certain kind of limited experience. In other words, it is not clear why Kantian transcendentalism needs to be rejected *tout court* by Herderians, especially because it can, not accidentally (given Herder’s education), lead to some similar limitative results.

Nonetheless: This rejoinder can appear to miss the key hermeneutical aspect of the Herderian claim, for it still seems obvious that the specifically Herderian kind of study of “subjectivity, experience, and judgment” involves a concrete approach to particular historical texts and contexts (75) that contrasts dramatically with Kant’s highly theoretical explorations of constitutive and regulative judgments in the first Critique. But here a Kantian still might counter that it is precisely the pluralistic Herderian (119) who should open up to the possibility of accepting an inclusive rather than exclusive attitude toward philosophical methodologies. That is, rather than demanding of philosophy that it proceed only by finding limits through the method of starting from sensitivity to the particularity of local contexts, why not allow that there are more abstract procedures that can also establish significant limits to human experience without at first

⁷ Such claims can come to acquire an a priori status, somewhat like truths about limits in advanced logic, which might have required considerable reflection before they became evident.

dwelling on historical specifics? Furthermore, unless it goes back to a general and paradoxical a priori exclusion of all a priori claims, a modest Herderianism should grant, I believe, that in many fields—philosophy of logic, language, and mathematics come immediately to mind⁸—a priori and transcendental argumentation is certainly worth exploring and can reach some “eternal” results that have a restrictive character at least somewhat similar to Herder’s broadest philosophical claims. At the same time, it is only appropriate to concede that, with respect to the specific topic of the philosophy of culture, there is special value in Herder’s innovative attention to the appreciation of distant and exotic texts—not only Hebrew poetry (185) and Shakespeare but also Egyptian civilization (156) and many other religious and aesthetic traditions that have been all too neglected by “mainline” philosophy.

It is important, however, to try to pinpoint what is truly distinctive in this “special value.” It does not suffice to contrast the colorful detail of Herder’s concrete historical and aesthetic discussions merely with the abstract prime subject matter of Kant’s first Critique. The fact is that in many other places Kant too has a lot to say about particular historical and aesthetic phenomena and often, like Herder, in a very enlightened and cosmopolitan manner. Unfortunately, it is also true that, at times, Kant voiced many of the most unfortunate prejudices of his own context—and it is not an easy matter to evaluate exactly how a Herderian can best deal with issues such as the indisputable offensiveness of several of Kant’s cultural remarks. Precisely because it is Herder who insists that we first must try to understand others in terms of how they are determined by their own age and context, it might seem not so easy to mount a Herderian criticism of even Kant’s worst prejudices—for example, his repeated endorsement of sexism and racism (77). These prejudices can, after all, be seen as very much a function of the general and long-standing attitudes of Kant’s context, and sometimes they even seem based largely on so-called scientific findings—findings that, as Kant sometimes points out, need further

⁸ See Brandom (2005), 160: “it is possible to make non-genealogical sense [of logical concepts].”

checking.⁹ Moreover, as Gjesdal notes (197), Herder too is not free from what appear to be some highly improper expressions of prejudice. Gjesdal does not deny these lapses, and she admirably argues that we simply have to be prepared at times to critique Herder himself severely, while also realizing that then we are being true to the spirit of his own best Enlightenment principles, one of which is that the essence of true Enlightenment is openness to self-critique (200).¹⁰

If, however, we do rely in this way on genuine Enlightenment principles—for example, as Gjesdal does when she repeatedly praises the many “progressive” and pluralistic aspects of Herder’s writings (e.g., 167, 186), then it seems only fair to add that we also need to acknowledge that we cannot and should not avoid being “judgmental” in view of truths now taken to be “eternal and universal.” That is, it is not easy consistently to scold Herder whenever he is harsh, for example, about some ancient Chinese customs, while at the same praising him for his enlightened attitude toward “women, gender, and race” (13). Even if we need, as he reminds us, to proceed very cautiously in presuming we can genuinely understand what their ancient customs mean, it seems only self-deceptive to suppose, from what we do know, that they wouldn’t often clash sharply with our current progressive values. In other words, to be properly hermeneutical—and I trust Gjesdal would agree—is not to say, as Gadamer infamously suggested, that we can only understand “differently” and not better.¹¹ Even if Egyptian art should not be hastily condemned, as Herder points out that it improperly was by Winckelmann because it did not meet Greek standards (70, 126, 154), this does not mean that Egyptian slavery practices cannot be severely condemned by us. This is, of course, not to say that this ability to criticize shows that our own society remains above reproach; on the contrary, as Herder very strikingly pointed out about his all too satisfied imperialist era, there are many ways in which our own

⁹ See the remark on Tahitians, discussed in Ameriks (2012b), 227. Gjesdal reads this remark as basically an expression of Kant’s greater prejudice against “non-European cultures” (11, n 37), but I take Kant’s main point here to be rather an ethical one about Herder’s being dogmatically committed to a teleological scheme that at times appears to absolutize the value of mere sensory happiness (in which case, the “tranquil indolence” of Tahitians—if the characterization truly applies, for Kant explicitly states that the matter deserves further investigation—would, absurdly, be a highest ideal).

¹⁰ A similar strategy has been fruitfully employed in reacting to problematic issues in Kant. See e.g., work by B. Herman, J. Kneller, and P. Kleingeld.

¹¹ Gadamer (1989), 96.

culture exacerbates problems in ways that may be less acknowledged but are as pernicious as ancient slavery (91, 152, 168).

An appreciation of these points about value shows how, in yet another fortunate way, Herder's philosophy need not be as distant, as it at first appears, from many traditional and a priori views. Near the very beginning of Gjesdal's book (2, n 3), there is a reference to Rousseau's idea of "eternal laws of nature and order," and there is every reason to believe that both Herder and Kant, right from the early time that they were together in Königsberg, were above all committed to this general Rousseauian idea in its basic egalitarian sense. There are, of course, many differences in specifying what these "laws" are, for Herder has much more faith than Kant does in supposing that the notions of happiness and perfection are the most important ones to stress¹²—but this difference does not affect the basic point about their having some shared a priorism.

There is an additional very important aspect to what I would call Herder's underlying a priorism, an "elephant in the room" that is largely ignored in Gjesdal's work, as it is in most current treatments of Herder.¹³ This elephant is Herder's manifest commitment to a robust teleological and religious view of the basic structure of the universe¹⁴—a commitment that I see as not a matter of a later "metaphysical" (90) or mystical period but as a constant underlying standpoint, one which often does not get emphasized simply because it is being taken for granted. This point is not inconsistent with the fact that it is understandably fashionable nowadays to highlight how strikingly naturalistic, humanistic, and revisionist Herder's attitudes were toward biblical texts, traditional doctrines, and institutions.¹⁵ These very secular-sounding attitudes were quite common in the late eighteenth century German Enlightenment, and they should not blind us to the fact that, like many others then, Herder obviously felt comfortable in espousing such revisionist attitudes toward texts largely because he also thought that, given a

¹² See e.g., Herder (1997), 47.

¹³ An important exception is Boyle (2005), ch. 2.

¹⁴ On Herder's confident providentialism and faith in immortality, see e.g., (1997), 41-2 and 160.

¹⁵ See e.g., Herder (1997), 64, 94.

firm general providential faith, it does not matter if one cannot claim to have certainty about the esoteric truth or meaning of institution-based and scholastic creeds. As a confident and emotionally engaged believer (although a Deist, not a fundamentalist), he could be quite skeptical about particular dogmatic formulations as long as he always lived—as Rousseau, Jefferson, and many other brilliant minds also did then—with the strong presumption that the basic moral teachings of the founder of Christianity¹⁶ most appropriately express moral truths that are supposedly as self-evident as the basic harmony of the forces of nature (cf. “we hold these truths to be self-evident...”).

The crucial final link in this teleological attitude, common to Herder and Kant even if they expressed it philosophically in quite different ways, is the keystone belief that the laws of morality and the laws of nature are not just each necessarily valid but are tightly bound together, so that thereby at least something like an eternally meaningful human existence is secured in the long run. The remaining key question for them is simply how proper attention to these beliefs can be most effectively encouraged in a modern world that, as Rousseau argues, is complicated by ever more entangling layers of self-incurred immaturity. It is at this point that I believe one can best see how Herder’s historical turn is a kind of advance on Kant after all. The late Kant went out of his way to show that, despite his anti-fundamentalism, he was attached to the pure essence of the religious texts of his tradition as well as to the achievements of exemplary writers such as Milton, who, through their especially effective popular use of aesthetic and revolutionary ideas, could help hasten a “moral commonwealth” in line with the universal egalitarian doctrines of the Enlightenment.¹⁷ In the third Critique, the Religion book, and several carefully composed final essays, Kant began to work out a philosophical guideline, a *Leitfaden*, for how history might thus proceed in a fully progressive direction. What he could not do himself was engage in

¹⁶ On religion and Christianity’s special role, see Herder (1997), 87, 103, 145-8, and 159, “a divine economy has certainly ruled.”

¹⁷ See Ameriks (2016) and (2017). Gjesdal (54, n 56, and 71, n 71) tends to read the advocates of Jena Romanticism, such as Manfred Frank, as proposing that art (what the Romantics called “universal progressive poetry”) serve as a *substitute* for philosophy, but I read their key notion of “symphilosophy” as indicating an agreement with the view that, as hermeneutical, late modern philosophy and art can work most effectively *in tandem*. See Ameriks (2012a) and (2018). The latter essay concerns Nietzsche’s remark: “that [the limitation of science to phenomena] is tragic. That is Kant’s problem. Art now acquires an entirely new dignity. The sciences, in contrast are degraded to a degree.” From Nietzsche (1979), § 73.

rallying all classes in this Enlightenment direction through the most effective popular means. This was, however, a project that was taken up right then by Herder and several even more gifted poetic writers such as Schiller, Hölderlin, and Novalis—the Miltons of the German world.

Tragically, these extraordinarily talented philosopher-poets did not live long enough, and have enough help, to bring about lasting progress in their own era. History took a step backwards with the complications caused by reactionary responses to Jacobin and Napoleonic excesses. It might have seemed that all was lost then, around the turn into the nineteenth century—and yet, at the same time there was developing, within academic philosophy itself and among the comrades of the great German poetic writers, a movement that I have treated as the key “historical turn.” This turn was not historicism, or an anthropological turn, but rather a fundamental change in the style of at least one main branch of influential philosophical writing. It was undertaken in the face of the realization—which orthodox Kantianism admittedly was not up to—that late modern philosophy—or in Herder’s typically colorful phrase, “this autumn of our reflectiveness”¹⁸—in the wake of the event of the widespread success of the Scientific Revolution, needs to be distinguished by the feature of no longer trying to model itself (redundantly) on exact science. Instead, and in view of this development, philosophy needs to take on the form of a kind of broadly genealogical writing “in between” art and science—to invoke a characterization that Gjesdal also uses in describing a point that Herder especially appreciated (23), and that can be applied to works such as Hegel’s *Differenzschrift* and *Phenomenology*, on a modest reading. Philosophy in this new key is carried out not by quasi-geometric or Newtonian system-building, but primarily by means of a detailed and sequential argumentative engagement—with a hermeneutical sensitivity that reveals itself to be constantly in need of further improvement—with the complex human-nature-characterizing texts of one’s immediate predecessors.¹⁹

This revolutionary philosophical historical turn can be said to have been first influentially exemplified, albeit in a larval form, by none other than Herder, although—and this is mainly

¹⁸ Herder (1997), 46.

¹⁹ Examples of this progressive style of writing —neither art nor exact science but narrative *argument*—albeit expressed in a less abstract terms, can be found in legal history and other humanistic disciplines, including art history.

where I have picked up the story elsewhere—it took on its mature form only in the Jena writings of Reinhold, Schelling, and Hegel. The allies and successors of these exemplary geniuses are legion: Schlegel, Heine, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and many others in our time, in analytic (e.g., Brandom) as well as continental philosophy. In sum, it is as the procreative godfather (he presided at Reinhold’s wedding), one might say, of the ongoing historical turn in this sense that Herder deserves, after all, all the credit—and even more—that Gjesdal’s book has given him.

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Gjesdal, Kristin

Herder's Hermeneutics: History, Poetry, Enlightenment

Kristin Gjesdal. *Herder's Hermeneutics: History, Poetry, Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 232pp., US \$99.99, ISBN 9781316285770.

Reviewed by Anne Pollok, University of South Carolina

This book is an astute and interesting extension to Gjesdal's preceding study, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* from 2009. *Herder's Hermeneutics* offers a fresh reading of the early Herder,¹ casting him not as the Anti-Enlightenment irrationalist, but as working with basic enlightenment ideas (such as progress, humanity, perfectibility), reforming them, making them more dynamic, and relating them to the issue of understanding and interpretation: in short, of hermeneutics. Gjesdal's approach to reading Herder's early work on poetry and history as a consistent take on hermeneutics – which I read as an extension to Pross' monumental Herder edition which follows a similar line of understanding – is a perfect way to showcase Herder's importance both for his time, as well as for contemporary approaches to hermeneutics. To my mind (and obviously to Gjesdal's as well), a Herderian hermeneutics should figure as an alternative to Gadamer's ontological version.

Main topics for the 1760/70s for Herder are “the nature of interpretation, historical and cultural distance, the status of ancient and modern poetry, the ubiquity of prejudice, and the gains of intersubjective and intercultural understanding” (179, intro to chapter 7). Herder is presented as one of the few who really understood the “complexity of our cultural heritage” (208), even

¹ In line of the Herder revival in the last 15 years, see Zammito, Menges, Menze, “Johann Gottfried Herder Revisited,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71, no 4 (October 2010), 661-84.

though he might not have always been able to grasp it fully, nor extricate himself completely from his own prejudices.²

I very much appreciate Gjesdal's work for two main reasons. First, Gjesdal sets out to make an argument for the possibility of combining historicity and normativity (see in particular the conclusion of chapter 3). Related to this, second, Gjesdal offers a very fruitful reading of Herder's continuous concern to capture relations—between individual and humanity, between the individual and her historical situation—thus stressing the importance of *intersubjectivity* as a hermeneutical virtue. To clarify these two aspects, the following remarks center around the issue of understanding and its prerequisites. Overall, I found myself agreeing with nearly all of what Gjesdal says. However, I do think that Gjesdal did not point out sufficiently how, in Herder's view, the agent and the object specifically relate to one another in order to spell out the concrete criteria for adequate understanding.

As Gjesdal interprets the *Essay on Taste* (1766), interpretation requires an awareness of our historicity, cultural situatedness, reliance on language, and of the juxtaposition between an individual and universal standpoint. There is no fixed essence of humanity (that “universal” I just mentioned), but we can view all expressions of humanity as the dynamic presence of a universal theme which exists only through “change and cultural variation” (90). Understanding is hence always a movement: we start the process by being confronted with an “other” that we necessarily approach from our stance to bridge the gap of temporal and cultural distance. But the continuing encounter in turn forces us to view our position as being temporally and culturally infused as well. That is why understanding is an opportunity of “growth and self-realization” (90) (and also a reason why our assessments of past events, ideas, or people says a lot about our own time as well).

² Gjesdal clearly seeks to understand his work without being bound to “accept every part of it” (181), as her critical assessment of some of Herder's own prejudices throughout the study makes clear. This counts in particular for chapter 7, which is very rich in its assessment of hermeneutics and prejudice in Herder, but does not shy away from clearly noting Herder's own shortcomings. “In Herder's early work, these standards are related to independent thought and an enlightened form of enlightenment [?], while in his later work, the more comprehensive standard of humanity plays a larger role and, with it, Herder also develops a discourse that, at times, is infused with the less progressive values of his own culture and period” (207).

Gjesdal calls this a “dialectics between understanding and self-understanding, critique and self-critique” (91). Accordingly, the criteria for proper or correct understanding are themselves dynamic. But I cannot help but ask – in particular having the ever-critical Herder in the back of my head – what are they? When can we claim to have understood something? I will try to reconstruct Gjesdal’s account by focusing on four points that I take to be central positions of her interpretation of Herder’s hermeneutics: culture/nature, *Selbstdenken*, historicity, and *Bildung*.

We live in culture

Reading Herder as a hermeneutician requires a reinterpretation of his naturalism.³ And indeed, Gjesdal spells out Herder’s naturalism in a very attractive way that encapsulates what is human in a wider, more dynamic net than a reductionist understanding of nature as a set of laws,⁴ or an undulating monism.

Human nature is not just the sum of human behavior, but the intricate net of human expression and human mutual recognition. Human nature cannot be studied per se, but only through its manifestations, which are the proper expression and consolidation of what it means to be human. The study of these manifestations should become the foundation for a philosophy in the new sense.⁵ Herder’s famous quip that philosophy should become anthropology⁶ I would

³ See also Rachel Zuckert in her review of *Herder: Philosophy and Anthropology*, ed. Anik Waldow and Nigel deSouza (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) for Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews 12/11/2017. This is a counter-position to the naturalism as purported by John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: UCP, 2002), 158.

⁴ Nature is then “not one of permanent laws or an unchanging essence, but, rather, is understood as developing, as ever growing and changing, calling not only for mechanical explanations, but also biological models of evolution and gradually unfolding cycles of life” (3.IV, 97). This goes well with Adler’s understanding: “Nature, the anthropological, and the history of humanity belong together for Herder” (Hans Adler, “Herder’s Concept of Humanity,” *Studies in 18th Century Culture* 23 (1994), 55-74, 63).

⁵ “Human existence manifests itself as nature as well as culture” (41) – and I take “culture” to be equivalent to the “second nature” that Gjesdal also mentions (41, see also Intro, p. 14) for chapter 4.

⁶ PW 29/W I 134/*Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 38.

hence read in the same vein as Gjesdal: philosophy should become the hermeneutics of humanity, delving into the heart of what it means to be human.

Herder also understands this naturalism as a negative term, or better, a *fighting term* against speculative metaphysics. He wants to be concerned with “what is,” not with speculations about the “hidden designs of fate” (PHM 393, *Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 205). But: what *is*? For Herder, this is the dynamic, ordering principle of life that is situated, self-concerned, and indeed similar to Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein*. Maybe to his disadvantage (and Gjesdal notes this, but does not critique it, as far as I can see), he is always more interested in the principle itself, less in capturing it in detail: for this reason, he is less interested in capturing the values of each culture, but rather “the dynamic structures that characterize all historical cultures” (97). But to know that, doesn’t one need to start off from the particular? I will get back to this question shortly, but only via a reformulation of it that will guide my subsequent discussion: how can Herder bring together historicity and normativity, the particular and the universal? That is, can a historical approach to the expressions of humanity be brought under a principle of unity that the interpreter brings to this mass of information, and how can such a principle be justified, if not through an incomplete empirical induction?

***Selbstdenken* – the critical potential of understanding**

According to Gjesdal’s analysis in chapter 1, Herder’s critical basis for his undertaking is his negative diagnosis of contemporaneous philosophical efforts, which, so he contends, have become estranged from themselves and their proper subject and basic interests (28). Hence, philosophy lost its ability to interact with human society and culture (29). Herder’s alternative to take on “[i]ndependent thought – *Selbstdenken* – [thus] requires a new philosophical agenda...” (31).⁷

His discussion and reflections on poetry, as Gjesdal shows, are an integral part of this direction within Herder’s philosophy, and, as Gjesdal convincingly argues throughout the book,

⁷ It should be noted that Herder is not alone in this assessment, and maybe a further look towards the more serious philosophers among the so-called *Schulphilosophie* and well as *Popularphilosophie* (I am thinking of Sulzer, but more of Garve, Mendelssohn, and Abbt) would have broadened the view. But this is a sideline I cannot follow here.

are important to actually understanding his historical work in the 1770s.⁸ His interest in taste and history forms a “comprehensive discourse of what it means for a human being to be situated in a historical field, i.e., in a given horizon of value and meaning” (75), engaging in an intersubjective discourse on (mainly artistic) artifacts.

This is also reflected in the *Journal of my Voyage in the Year 1769*’s main claim that philosophy must be concerned with the *whole* human being (feeling and reason), and with *all* human beings (women, people of all classes, see *Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 39) through a fair regard of humanity’s “manifold expressions” (*Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 40). The mode of hermeneutical thought is encompassing and engaged in its subject matter: *Selbstdenken* does not put us outside of the sphere of human agency, but squarely within it (63), and is – at least in the case of understanding foreign texts or works – a reading with “participating concern” (*Theilnehmung*, 64)

Accordingly, as Gjesdal spells out in chapter 2 (and works out in the subsequent chapters), philosophy needs to engage with human expressions in art and history. However, philosophy, on this view, is not a mere abstract interpretation of these artifacts within a rational system (which would, again, prioritize the abstract over the concrete), but “realizes itself as a practice that is and should be immersed in its historical culture” (45). Hermeneutically, we are thus concerned with the relation between the abstract, which *captures* the meaning, and the concrete, which *manifests* the meaning. For Herder, the starting point is the work as a concrete realization of a universal idea that can never find its encompassing embodiment in just one particular object. Reductionism just does not make any sense in a Herderian universe.

But it seems to me that Herder put himself, if I read Gjesdal’s account correctly, in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, he relies on the aforementioned argument for the necessity of a kind of perspectivism. On the other, Herder does insinuate at points that he has captured the “true nature”⁹ of his object (e.g. Egypt, Greek and Roman culture, as he argues in

⁸ “His earlier turn to taste, however, demonstrates how his reflection on the history of art and philosophy itself calls for reflection on the historicity of our thinking, about art and beauty – and ultimately also a discussion of the historicity of human judgment, thought, and practice” (*Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 74).

⁹ See “This, Too...,” PW 283/W IV, 23, *Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 155: the goal of an adequate description of, say, Egyptian culture is a depiction of the past “according to *their own nature and manner*.”

This, Too, A Philosophy of History (1774), see *Herder's Hermeneutics*, 157-63). If, according to Herder's argumentation, there is no "objective understanding," since understanding is always dynamic, involving an interpreter and an object shaped by another, prior interpreter, then the claim of understanding a true nature of a past people becomes questionable. Maybe we can only hope for a more or less adequate understanding of something that is not *blinded* by prejudice (and hence does not put our presence into the past) while at the same time accepting the positive force of prejudice (as a *positioning of oneself*). In that case, true understanding can never be more than a regulative principle, and it works both ways: toward an understanding of the past and a new representation of the present. But, the question remains, what is the source of such a normative claim? In short, I am concerned with how Herder argues for the basis of the criteria of hermeneutics that yields reliable results, and hence, a "better" – if dynamic – reading of a historical text.

Let me try to spell out Herder's conception of the actual process of hermeneutic understanding in reference to Gjesdal's discussion of the *Fragments of a Treatise on the Ode* (1764), and the *Critical Forests* (chapter 2): in general, "[t]he ode is a *Gestalt* that appears as one and unified (and is, as such, recognizable), yet its oneness, envisioned in the form of a germ cell or a potentiality, is only realized across a roaster of shapes and appearances." (*Herder's Hermeneutics*, 51). Let us break up this process of understanding:

1. First, we take the historical realization of a poetic form – in this case the ode – dynamically as a "living essence:" a "germ cell" that changes and develops, but remains one form. But how do we know about this "germ cell" in the first place? Do we take one piece as paradigmatic and subsequently relate others to it, thereby constantly changing and enlarging the set of attributes?

2. After this analysis, we analyze the parts to better see the whole picture again (50).¹⁰ This allows us to envisage the “germ cell” in its more mature and complex manifestations, and appreciate its various formations.
3. From this activity emerges the “dynamical principles” (52) of understanding. They stem from an impression of “a certain general unity of sensibility, of expression, and of harmony, which makes possible the drawing of a parallel among all of them” (SEW 37, *Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 51). But how are they apprehended? By the philosopher who subjected herself to a manifold of these expressions, and comes to see the parallels by realizing, in a fit of genius, their *Gestalt*?

This process of understanding, all questions aside, clarifies how we come to formulate certain artistic categories. What is important for Herder is that to recognize something as a case of x, we need to take into account the historicity of human life and culture (57) and of our ways of reflecting on these (mostly: in language). However, as an important caveat (as developed in chapter 3): there can be no universal rule to mark a work as “art proper” (79), no rational deduction, nor a focus on historical origin (since that would beg the question, I assume). What is left, for now, is an awareness of art’s situatedness that needs to be painstakingly captured.

Historicity as temporal and cultural dependence

In the same dynamic vein, Herder claims that aesthetics must always grow out of art, not be set up against its actual practice (52).¹¹ We can already sense, and Gjesdal explicates this in

¹⁰ Gjesdal does not quite note that this is purely taken from Mendelssohn’s 1755 *Letters on Sentiments*, where Theokles shows how the clear and distinct rational judgment concerning a particular aspect of an artwork can be made “confused” again by its re-integration into the artistic whole. This is just another way of bringing the rational, principled, “cold” understanding together with a more empirically driven, emotional involvement with the artwork. See Anne Pollok, *Facetten des Menschen* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2010), 167-78.

¹¹ Interesting here is Herder’s positive account on the *Litteraturbriefe* (*Herder’s Hermeneutics*, chapter 2.II) in the *Fragments*. These do not develop an artificial system, but grow organically – in a similar way as language does (*Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 57).

chapter 6, Herder's critical stance towards all attempts to de-temporalize¹² what is inherently a subject of history and its changes.

As you can see in my questions above, I am still unsure as to how we can actually close the gap between a unique work and a *Gestalt* other than instinctively feeling it. How can we reflect from an evolving, moving point (ourselves) on a constantly morphing shape (the artwork) drawn from an equally shifting point (the artist)?¹³ To get closer to an understanding of how this fluidity could be pinned down, I follow Gjesdal's interpretation of Herder's works on poetry, but also on taste (as a propaedeutic of historical philosophy, offered in chapters 3, 5,6). Thus, a list for possible criteria for adequate understanding grows as follows:

4. As discussed, the interpretation of human symbolic articulation (or expression) is always historically and culturally mediated. Hence, ideally, a work is neither measured by our standards or by allegedly universal standards, but by its potential to "express its^[14] own time." (146) With this, the potential foreignness of the artwork is stressed, and its function as a means to find entry to another time and culture is enabled.
5. Any work of art must be approached as being part of "a wider context of ethical culture" (76), and thus works with "a larger set of religious, ethical, and political ideas and sentiments" (77). However, over large portions of Gjesdal's study, the reader is quite unsure what all this actually amounts to, or, better put, how this indeed avoids in particular the last risk of inserting one's own concerns into a foreign work (or whether we are meant to take Herder's reading as "inspired," and hence opaque to technique).
6. Hence, I think we would need to explicate how exactly we must take areas other than purely aesthetic categories into consideration, such as contemporaneous political systems,

¹² "Herder's goal is not so much to provide a historical treatise as to show that historical consciousness is constantly driven by a temptation to go beyond its own mandate and construct narratives about the past that serve the interests of the present" (*Herder's Hermeneutics*, 152).

¹³ The risks are high: in particular, Gjesdal mentions the unholy trinity of misinterpretation due to (1) temporal distance, (2) cultural diversity, and (3) projecting one's own views onto the piece (or the time) in question. She also convincingly shows how Herder argues against the three possible ailments: the theory of divine origin, the perfection model, or the principle of the imitation of nature (see subchapter 2.III).

¹⁴ That "its time" refers to the actual time when the play was written becomes clearer in Gjesdal's discussion of prejudice (146-148). There, she also says that Herder does not quite say how we do this, but what we gain from doing this (148).

food supply, environmental conditions that shape how we secure what we deem important (use of other people as slaves, keeping food “kosher” to survive, etc.), pervasive family structures, etc. Is this covered under Gjesdal’s reference in chapter 3.I (77) as part of “moral, cultural, and political sensibilities”? The reader is unsure, and would wish for a few more words according to the critical potential and possible hierarchies among these other factors that Herder claims to have understood so well.

7. As Gjesdal shows in chapter 5, the *Shakespeare Essay* in its final form (1773) fulfills the move from the problem of general definitions (1st version) over the historicity of reason (2nd version) toward an outlook as to how these two shape the interpreter’s horizon and understanding. Hence, it is not only awareness of the historical circumstances of the object, but also of the interpreter that plays a crucial part in understanding.

Art (that I keep treating as the epitome of a historical artifact)¹⁵ is hence not something in the ideal realm of atemporality. But it is firmly situated in our lives, a fruit of our particular developments. As Herder holds in the *Fragments on the Latest German Literature*, such ideas of what a proper artistic object is are “mostly a composition of those features that made an impression on us as our taste was formed and developed” (SWA 26/*Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 82). We can come to an agreement, and that agreement [or just “that”] will tell us about the object (ideally, as situated in its particular temporal niche), as well as about ourselves as observers. Herder even develops a tentative hierarchy for instances of such tastes. A lower taste will turn towards “color and major expressive modes and features,” higher spirits will look for “regularity of the finer features,” “and, finally, an advanced kind of judgment that is attuned to spiritual beauty (*geistige Schönheit*), as it is expressed through the eyes and other bodily expressions” (SWA 36, but I cite Gjesdal’s reformulation, *Herder’s Hermeneutics*, 82-83). Apparently, these are indeed universal – if merely formal – aspects of appreciation. Note, however, that the ranking from “lowest” to “highest” does indicate a somewhat ahistorical

¹⁵ I am aware that this is an oversimplification, but one that could, I hope, spur some more fruitful discussion.

universal development of human taste (that mirrors the genetic thesis of *This, Too, A Philosophy of History*).¹⁶

In *On the Change of Taste* (1766) Herder asks “how human thought and judgment are conditioned by the cultural and historical context in which they emerge” (85-86). His idea is not, however, to equate philosophy with history, but he argues – according to Gjesdal’s reading – that historicity emerges as a necessary condition of philosophical understanding. Any philosopher who tries to put himself above culture ultimately bases his conclusions “on unsustainable premises” (86). Herder ultimately makes a normative claim that includes historicity as a condition of “education and growth”, and embraces diversity as a “fundamental condition of human existence” (89). His philosophy offers a take on how value judgments “ought to proceed in order to escape the provincialism he criticizes within his own Enlightenment culture” (89). And thus emerges the concept of a “shared humanity” as the normative center of Herder’s hermeneutics.

Intersubjectivity as a mode of understanding and a mode of being¹⁷: *Bildung*

As Gjesdal summarizes in chapter 3 (but this also belongs to her assessment of *Bildung* in chapter 6):

The human being cannot be pinned down in terms of an ahistorical and transcultural essence, but exists in and through historical change and cultural variation. Yet, in the diversity of taste, value, and practice, it still remains that creatures of our kind realize their nature through culture in a way that can be studied in general, philosophical terms. (90)

What are these terms? Those that “analyze the conditions for, and possibility of, such growth and self-realization in culture” (90)? It seems that this does not mean that Herder could just descriptively assess all such phenomena, but that he has to pose *a universal ‘nature’ that is only*

¹⁶ I leave it as an open question how this teleological reading of history can be reconciled with the more radically naturalist claims in *On Cognition and Sensation*.

¹⁷ I agree with Zammito et al, *Herder Revisited*, 673, that Herder is never concerned with being as Sein, but as Dasein: being immersed, being there.

visible through realizations (containing the universal in the particular). With this, all understanding becomes a double-sided approximation. On the one hand, the object is seen as an expression of humanity as situated in its time and place. On the other, through such an analysis the interpreter gains a means to understand herself *as situated* as well. This is my interpretation of Gjesdal's result that Herder's "early work is rooted in the concept of a human nature that gains reality in and through our engagement with a variety of different cultures and historical periods" (90-91), which is only visible through a human being that can *sympathize* with these conditions without getting lost in them.

We encounter this awareness of natural lawful dynamics *on the symbolic level*. This encounter is profoundly different from the natural world of the first order, since it rests on understanding and mutual recognition. As Gjesdal states in reference to the *Preisschrift* from 1773, "humanity in us is brought forth and realized through our relationship to the humanity in others" (100). This is not only an issue of language (an area I have completely left out here for the sake of time),¹⁸ but of understanding as a means of self-delineation through an active relation to the other.

In chapter 4, Gjesdal shows how Herder develops a hermeneutics concerned with "an organic relationship between the individual and humanity [...] and between an individual and his or her concrete historical context" (103). For such a hermeneutics, *sympathy* is a basic technique by the interpreter to "form a basic hypothesis about the meaning of an expression" (103). What Gjesdal shows here – even though she does not state this explicitly – is that thus a *conceptual* unity within humanity emerges: "All nature is characterized by a diversity of life-forms. Yet, unlike other parts of nature, human beings, precisely in their diversity, should also be attuned to a shared humanity and ability to reason" (204). However, as Gjesdal stresses – rightfully so, for Herder's philosophy – this conceptual basis must be realized in language and culture, and can only be discerned in this way, through *Bildung*: the hermeneutically gained predisposition of an interpreter to subject her prejudices to a critical review.

¹⁸ See on this, for instance, Jürgen Trabant's work, such as "Herder's Discovery of the Ear," *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder Conference*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 345-66, and *Mithridates im Paradies. Kleine Geschichte des Sprachdenkens* (München: Beck, 2003).

A philosophy of humankind must pay attention to these forms, since these, as expressions of humanity, form the fundamental human practice of mutual encounter and mutual shaping. With this, as Gjesdal discusses in chapter 6.5, Herder transforms enlightenment philosophy from *within* by showcasing the hermeneutic potential of *Bildung*: “Enlightenment” seeks the universal mold, but overlooks that we as reasonable beings are situated within a culture and tradition. The kind of universal that we seek is never ‘pure’ – and why should it be? (171) Instead, “humanity is actualized in and through a complex web of symbolic, epistemic, and moral practices and their implicit conceptions of normativity” (212). *Bildung* does not happen by a shaping of everything or even others according to our picture, but endorses diversity as its fundamental norm (see also 8).

This is akin to Herder’s anti-perfectionist argumentation in the letters with Mendelssohn in 1768 concerning the human vocation and immortality (that Gjesdal does not discuss). There, Herder argues against an unlimited development or gain in *perfection* of the soul in the afterlife with reference to the context-sensitivity of perfection.¹⁹ Nothing is “perfect” in and of itself, but only in relation to a particular goal, or functional background. “Bildung,” in the same vein, does not amount to our becoming more perfect *per se*, but references our *adaptability*.²⁰ What most enlightenment thinkers overlook is that this means a dynamic, open ended understanding of *Bildung* – we will not at some point realize the highest rational point and then have it (we will never, in other words, be perfect), but we will rise to it again and again, according to our particular situation in history.

Concluding Remark: Herder’s Style

One issue that I do not remember being discussed extensively in Gjesdal’s study, but that I think is important, is Herder’s *style*. I think that his often breathless, imprecise, allusive,

¹⁹ See Frederick C. Beiser, “Mendelssohn Versus Herder on the Vocation of Man,” *Moses Mendelssohn’s Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, ed. Reinier Munk (New York: Springer, 2011), 235-44, here 242, and my reply in “How to dry our tears? Abbt, Mendelssohn, and Herder on the Immortality of the Soul”, *Interdisziplinäres Jahrbuch Aufklärung*. Ed. Gideon Stiening, Udo Thiel (Hamburg: Meiner, 2018), 67-81, 76-78.

²⁰ Herder’s *Hermeneutics*, 173/PW 323: “all formation [*Bildung*] rose out of the most particular *individual* need and returned back to it.”

metaphorical, etc., way of writing is meant as a living comment on his believe in inspiration as the source of true understanding. For Herder, there is one aspect that cannot be learned or abstracted in understanding, and that is *Einfühlung*, the immediate immersion into the other person's horizon, a more intuitive, almost spiritual connection that goes beyond the mere deciphering of unfamiliar words or symbolic systems. As he argues in the *Torso*, this connection between human beings can be forged by words. However, these words are open, multi-dimensional, and cannot easily be narrowed down to *the one* true meaning. Truly understanding someone means more than knowing all about this person (as he claims, he did not really need to know Abbt personally). Rather, it means that there is a connection that words can start, but only an intuition (here of the non-Kantian variety) can fulfill. Just as we do not have one fixed, objective reality to relate to, the final building block of understanding is not open to philosophical reflection and has to be given poetically.

I am aware that this leads away from the possibility of an objective understanding, and that it opens, again, the door for 'personal,' 'opaque' interpretation via divination, a "living reading," as Herder also calls it in *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* (123). I do, however, think that we read Herder all too charitably if we do not include this caveat – and I am very curious what Gjesdal's further thoughts on this issue are.

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Herder's Hermeneutics: Reply to Anne Pollok and Karl Ameriks

Kristin Gjesdal

A book on Herder's hermeneutics might strike some readers as unexpected and in need of justification. Herder's work, after all, falls outside the traditional canon of thinkers in this period; even for those who take his work seriously, hermeneutics might seem like a surprising focus for a monograph. In what follows, I want first to explain my motivation, as somebody who works in the areas of hermeneutics, aesthetics, and nineteenth-century thought, for turning to Johann Gottfried Herder. I also want to shed light on the main arguments of my study: the idea that Herder has a hermeneutic philosophy and that his hermeneutic philosophy is worth our time. I will also sketch what I, during my work on Herder, perceived as the limitations of his position and then point out a few ways in which to respond to these limitations and make productive use of the resources provided by his contribution. Finally, I turn to the responses offered by my two very thoughtful readers, Anne Pollok and Karl Ameriks.

1.

Why a study of Herder? Why a study of his contribution to hermeneutics? And why a study that centers on his early work, the work in between his reflection on the discipline of philosophy in the mid-1760s and *This Too a Philosophy of History* (1774)? My book is not limited to this period, although it is, no doubt, its *Schwerpunkt*.

If philosophy, in a hermeneutic spirit, is viewed as dialogical, then a turn to history is often presented as a gesture facilitating high-quality conversation. Past works that have been handed down to us have withstood the test of time. For this reason, they are, we tend to think, worth engaging with. However, most of us would grant that the formation of disciplinary canons—who is seen as worth listening to, who is credited as “original,” “deep,” and so on—is not free of prejudice, bias, and historical limitations. We need not be fully-fledged Nietzscheans to grant

that a canon is not given, but constructed. From this point of view, turning to a philosopher such as Herder—clearly important, yet not somebody whose work has not received the kind of attention bestowed on Kant or Hegel—can serve as a genealogical reality-check. It can be a critical exercise; it can help us clarify the way we have, typically, written the history of a given period and help us think about what priorities undergird the choices made. Does it, for example, matter that Herder is such an interdisciplinary thinker? Does it influence the reception (or lack of reception) of Herder's philosophical work that he is critical of transcendental philosophy in an era during which the idealists, such as Hegel, were able to write the history of the immediate past? Does it matter that the young Herder focuses so centrally on aesthetics, which itself is a subfield that is often under-prioritized? Does it make a difference that his agenda is pursued in an anthropological and political spirit and thus challenges our dominant understanding of the ideal of a disinterested, pure science?

Beyond these questions, I am interested in the intellectual tendencies that crystallize in Herder's work. Herder is quite unique in the way he draws on anthropology, history, literature, and politics. His philosophy, further, promotes disciplinary modesty. It seeks to initiate conversation across the human, social, and natural sciences. Relatedly, I take an interest in his commitment to an empirically and historically informed approach to philosophy—what he himself addresses as a bottom-up rather than top-down approach. In this respect, Herder was part of a larger movement in the late eighteenth century. I would include A. W. and Friedrich Schlegel, Schelling, and Schleiermacher in this lineage of thought. Staël was also influenced by his work – its content *and* methodology.

Herder's work is not easy to read. A stern critic of high-flying system-building and abstract theoretical constructions, his writing is experimental. He is testing out ideas, returning to and revising old notions, provoking his readership with polemical outbursts, exaggerations, and Socratic irony. He writes fragments, dialogues, essays, letters, poems, and songs. He theorizes about poetry *and* collects and translates folk songs. In this sense, his work not only encourages thinking about the embedded interests and biases shaping our narratives on nineteenth-century philosophy but also provokes reflection on what philosophical writing and thinking can be—and

what kind of work we, as historians, will have to invest in trying to reconstruct the rationale behind these different ways of philosophizing and do justice to them.

Herder's work is also refreshing to read. He writes with unusual energy. He is indignant. He is unashamedly political. At times, he is unapologetically angry. The reader clearly senses that he cares about his topics. But not only does Herder write with unusual passion about the topics under investigation. His topics are also such that we should care about them. These are a few examples: In a time-period where racism and Euro-centric discourse abounds in philosophy, Herder is deeply and profoundly critical of colonialism, slavery, and Euro-centric discourses of all kinds. The young Herder preaches religious tolerance. He defends social justice and the idea of education to a wider public. He pleads for getting more books into the hands of women and, further, realizes that women can in fact do philosophy (they should not only read but also write philosophy books). He wants to get philosophy out of its ivory tower. He wants to put an end to philosophers' often condescending attitudes to the other human sciences. He defends an interesting version of naturalism, of second nature, and of *Bildung* in and through culture and the cultural (human) sciences. He wants philosophy to be part of a broader, enlightened commitment to civic discourse. He seeks to think about normativity in understanding while remaining committed to his historicist approach. Herder, in short, deserves our attention: He is not an easy thinker, but he asks questions that are still philosophically burning and relevant.

2.

Why a turn to Herder and hermeneutics, then? I would like to make two initial points of clarification. First, I am not claiming that Herder's philosophy is *only* a hermeneutic philosophy. He has an interesting philosophy of nature, a political philosophy, a philosophical anthropology, an aesthetics, an epistemology, an ethics, and so on. Hermeneutics is only one plane along which his thinking develops. However, because of his commitments to historically and culturally sensitized ways of philosophizing, hermeneutics is particularly central to his thought. If he cannot provide a hermeneutic anchoring point, his contribution is likely to falter. Second, I am not claiming that Herder is the *only* late 18th-century philosophy whose contributions to hermeneutics, broadly understood, is worth our time. There is Meyer, for a start, and

Schleiermacher a bit later. Friedrich and A. W. Schlegel should also be mentioned. Their contributions are many and extraordinarily rich. They extend both back in time, to the figures Anne Pollok is working on, and forward in time, towards, for example, Karl Reinhold, who has been a figure Karl Ameriks has done much to rehabilitate.

There are a number of reasons why, among these figures, I made Herder the focus of my study. Having worked for a while on Heidegger and Gadamer's contributions to hermeneutics – their respective versions of the ontological turn – I was frustrated with how they collapsed a discussion of Dasein's historical being-in-the world, on the one hand, and the question of interpretation (of texts, art, historical events), on the other. It is, in my view, not given that we best address the challenges of interpretation (of symbolic meaning) by reference to a philosophy of the human being in the world. Nor is it, in my view, given that there is *one* way of being-in-the-world and that our world-disclosive practices can be described in universal categories à la Heidegger. I was also frustrated with Heidegger's and Gadamer's reconstructions of the history of hermeneutics, which, I felt, were both too polemical and too teleological. On their models, the history of hermeneutics is not constructed as a set of competing, systematical alternatives, but as a narrative of trial and error that led—necessarily?—to Heidegger's ontological turn with *Being and Time*. Finally, and most importantly, I was unsatisfied with the deeper question, the driving philosophical concern, that motivates their works: the sense that our understanding of tradition is withering, that the great works of the canon are no longer taken to be authoritative. While certainly legitimate, this question has steered hermeneutics into a one-way street. And Herder, I think, is a philosopher whose work can help us look beyond this impasse.

In Herder's work, especially the early texts, reflections on understanding grow out of a set of questions that are very different from the leading questions of later philosophers such as Heidegger and Gadamer. Herder is not interested in ontology of the Heideggerian kind. Instead, he poses questions such as: Who gets to write the history through which we tend to understand ourselves? Whose voices are heard? Whose voices are forgotten? Who gets, say, to decide what art is important? What works are left out of the spotlight? Can we think about normative questions within art, culture, social and political practice without also taking into account how our self-understanding and vocabularies are situated in a particular time and a particular culture,

being limited and biased? Is there a relationship between the way in which we understand ourselves, as presumably enlightened and critically minded, and the way we treat others? And could we imagine alternatives histories—and in their wake, alternatives to colonializing, slavery, and potentially condescending, Euro-centric attitudes?

These, I think, are important questions. It is important that they are asked as part of the late Enlightenment turn to history and culture. It is, moreover, important that they are pitched in the period just prior to and around the pre-critical Kant. And, as hermeneutic philosophers, it is important to ask what our discipline will look like (what systematic vistas are disclosed) if we take the late Enlightenment to be a moment that shapes our commitments and orientations.

This, in short, is what I have tried to do in *Herder's Hermeneutics*. And in this sense, the study is a follow-up – historical in form, systematic in its interest—to my previous monograph, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* (CUP 2009). I am interested, in short, in diversifying the field of hermeneutics: both in the sense of including philosophers whose significance has previously been downplayed, and in emphasizing a hermeneutic model that does not simply spring out from a mourning for a lost tradition, but from an excitement about traditions merging, discourses enriching each other, and pluralism within a given culture being both a challenge and a resource.

3.

For those of us with an interest in hermeneutics, the young Heidegger and later Gadamer shaped our discipline as it stands today. Critiquing what he saw as a prevailing lack of historical consciousness, Gadamer emphasized the power and all-pervading importance of tradition. It is through our being part of, being born into, a tradition that a culture and symbolic space are disclosed to us. It is the continuum, the background, against which understanding and interpretation occurs. I fear that this approach to hermeneutics leaves us with an unproductive and binary choice: either we are abstract and ahistorical (the way Gadamer accuses the Enlightenment and the later idealists of being) *or* we follow him in emphasizing the self-productive, self-correcting power of tradition. Herder, I think, plots an alternative route through this territory. For him, language and tradition certainly disclose a world. But neither language nor

tradition should be one and monolithic. Nor is tradition free of mistakes and bias. We are in tradition and need tradition and culture as beings whose lives are realized through our second nature, but *yet* we need an on-going and critical reflection on—a Nietzschean would say a genealogy of—the values handed down to us.

For Herder (and later Schleiermacher), this gets articulated through a commitment to method—a commitment Heidegger and Gadamer steadily critiqued. In my view, though, it is an open question what is implied in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century turn to methodology in hermeneutics. Herder, Schleiermacher, and Dilthey all have different notions of a hermeneutic method. For Herder (and here, the early Kantian influence comes to mind), a reflected, hermeneutic-methodological approach is one that is self-critical and that takes into account the limitations of a given tradition or culture. A critical-methodological approach reflects on prejudices. Herder does not provide absolute standards by which such reflections should proceed. However, he thinks that we are, as human beings, capable of approaching others with sympathy and that we need to add to this initial sympathy or congeniality a willingness to try and understand them with reference to their own world, the things they cared about, and the vocabularies they had at their disposal. Does this guarantee objective understanding? No, it does not. All it guarantees is that we, as historical beings, have a way to conceptualize the kind of commitments that can lead us to question prejudices and bias and thus help towards facilitating genuine understanding. For Herder, this is not simply a question of understanding culturally and temporally distant others. It is also a question of understanding what kind of creatures we are, what kind of epistemological horizons we work within, and what our goals, as epistemic and practical agents, should be.

Herder is a Kantian in the sense that he cares about the conditions of possibility for understanding (and he does not think that securing correct interpretation in each particular case is within the scope of philosophy). But he is not a Kantian in that he will insist, definitely in his early period and probably also in his later work, that our thinking about—even our normative thinking about—interpretation will have to proceed from and on the basis of actual interpretative practices. Further, the imperative of understanding—I do think there is such a thing in his work—does not have to do with an interpreter following a methodological check-list that eventually

leads to understanding. It follows from our historical outlook—an outlook that is limited: not contingently, but *constitutively* so. As historically embedded, we are creatures that simply function better, that grow and develop, when we gain a broader scope and understanding of ourselves and the world in and through hermeneutic encounters with others.

4.

Many thanks to Anne Pollok and Karl Ameriks for their perceptive and generous comments: I feel lucky to have two such well-qualified and perceptive readers. Of the questions they raise, I want to focus on determining Herder's position as an Enlightenment thinker. Pollok and Ameriks are right to point out that it is now more or less *comme il faut* to see Herder in these terms. The question, though, is what *kind* of an enlightenment thinker he is. While Pollok's areas of expertise helpfully cover the period immediately prior to Herder, Ameriks turns to his contemporaries and successors.

I want to start by addressing the concern, raised by both Pollok and Ameriks, about Herder's attempt to bring together a commitment to historicity and a commitment to normativity. This is related to, but not entirely overlapping with, the worry about a possible inconsistency in Herder's dealing with transcendental arguments (or in my dealing with Herder's dealing of this point). I admit that these are not easy questions. Moreover, I don't think Herder's work provides us with only one response to these questions. This, rather, is something he grapples with throughout his work and he explores a number of different solutions.

In his early work, Herder appears to insist that the standards by which a culture should be assessed are relative to a culture. His claim, more precisely, is that the standard of happiness, i.e., of human flourishing, is internal to a way of life and cannot be universalized. There is a strong and a weak way of reading this point. The weak reading would suggest that we humans live and thrive across a spectrum of cultures and that each of these cultures will facilitate different models of flourishing. This, in a certain sense, is a trivial point and would not take much to endorse. The stronger (normative) reading would take Herder to indicate that cultural diversity and the fact that we, as finite human beings, are constitutively situated in culture make it impossible to say anything at all about what is right and what is wrong beyond our particular cultural practices

(i.e., Right or Wrong). Herder has sometimes been taken to defend a position—epistemically and morally—of the latter kind. This, however, is a misreading. He *does* critique other cultures' practices: widow burning, ancient and modern slavery, and colonialism are some examples. When he criticizes, say, slavery, he actively and consciously criticizes this practice with a notion of humanity in hand. On the one hand, he is, in other words, descriptively (or historically, as Pollok puts it) pointing out cultural diversity across regions and time-periods. On the other, he holds up, normatively, a notion of shared humanity. How, then, can these points be squared? Or, rather, how does the young Herder set out to square them?

Herder, as I read his early work, assumes that every culture realizes, or allows for, a range of human possibilities. This is, as it were, a standard to which they can be held responsible. Herder points out that oftentimes when we encounter inhuman practices such as slavery, these practices are justified by exempting the enslaved from the general understanding of humanity. The same applies to practices such as widow-burning or leaving physically handicapped children to die (Herder's examples). From this point of view, his critical strategy is not ahistorical or launched from an external standpoint. It is, rather, to ferret out and respond to what he views as a failure, within a given practice, to live up to its own standard of humanity.¹

As a naturalist of sorts, Herder defends the idea that the human race extends to all human beings. From the side of nature, there is no group, race, or gender that is over or beyond others. There are no groups within our species, that of humankind, that should be excluded from our understanding of the species as such. This is the basic claim from which Herder proceeds. We could call it normative, but I am not sure he would be happy with that. From his point of view, he is simply describing the nature of the human being as a being that develops, corresponding with its predispositions and in a given environment, with language, reason, feelings—and in practices that are necessarily intersubjective, historical, and culturally coined.

The hermeneutic standard he holds us to is that we should treat others (all others, not others who simply look like us or speak our language) with tolerance, respect, and as human

¹If, say, men are not thrown on the pyre when their wives die, then this tells us something about a standard of humanity in this context: women are not perceived as fully human. Likewise if boys get education, but girls do not. The standard need not be external to the culture, but could be led back to the fact that only the humanity of boys is fully recognized. The only thing that is needed, on Herder's account, is thus the insistence that the governing notion of humanity includes all members of the human species.

beings. In his view, tolerance is required because it belongs to the nature of our species—and here we differ in degree from other species—that we realize ourselves in an infinite number of ways. To understand what it is to be part of our species involves a commitment to reflect on and be open to this diversity.

With respect to this point, Herder's position changes in his later work. In the years after *This Too a Philosophy of History*, there is a period of more dense, theological writings. Then we get the big and significant opuses of *Ideen* and the *Humanitätsbriefe*. These works, in my view, display a religious motivation. Especially in *Ideen*, we see that Herder hopes for a gradual development of humankind, a realization of its manifold potential, that will, eventually, lead to a point from which its potential is fully realized. He is hoping, as a regulative idea, that at this point, finite human beings can fully understand themselves: that our humanity has been realized and expressed. I see him, at this point, as close to Hegel (and follow Charles Taylor's early work at this point). Thus, I think the relevant question here is not so much whether Herder, in the late period (the period going beyond what I cover in my book), is a transcendental philosopher of the Kantian sort, but, rather, whether he helps himself to some notion of absolute knowledge—which, at least according to his early outlook, would be a problematic notion. I don't have a final answer to this question, but I am inclined to think that there are such tensions in his late work.

I want to turn at this point toward Ameriks' concern about a tendency to emphasize the more "progressive" dimensions of Herder's philosophy. I have tried to be reasonably balanced in my survey of his work. That is, I have tried to show how his commitment to tolerance, say, is sometimes exercised in his own judgments, and sometimes not. I am also aware of the risk of passing judgments on his work from within our twenty-first-century setting and our particular scheme of values. However, I don't think one needs to be unduly presentist in order to see Herder's anti-slavery activities as progressive. They were progressive in his time. He followed the anti-slavery movement and read about the Quakers in Philadelphia. He systematically demolished the arguments by the anti-slavery movement in England and found them unacceptable in that they focused on economy, not on humanity. In this sense, I think he does stand out within his own cultural horizon. With his judgment on Chinese culture, by contrast, I think he was behind some of the existing literature that was available to him, Leibniz being only

one example. The same applies to his reading of ancient Hebrew literature: some of it is fascinating, while other parts are problematic (to us, as they must also have been Herder's contemporary readers). Even though I take the point that we should be careful in our selection of what views to endorse as "progressive," and maybe it is better not use this language at all, I think we *can* indeed see that there were ways, in the 1770s, say, to be more or less enlightened in one's practices and thinking about others.

Like most of us, Herder is not always true to his principles. In my study, I wanted to emphasize this point because I fear there is a tendency, in the literature, to see him either as a problematic *Sturm und Drang*-persona (who, like Plato, Hegel, and Nietzsche would find favor with later National Socialists) *or* as a philosophical saint. My own view is that, as somebody working in hermeneutics, there is very interesting material in his work, but I am not committed to accepting each and every dimension of it, nor to suggesting that his work is entirely superior to other philosophers writing in the period.

Then to Ameriks' point about Herder, in spite of his being critical of transcendental philosophy, being a closet Kantian. A few basic points: First of all, one of the things I wanted, in my book, is to emphasize the similarities between Herder and Kant, especially the pre-critical Kant, whose work I find systematically underrated. I think it is clear that Herder's and Kant's philosophies develop out of the same intellectual environment, and that they do, in important ways, seek to answer the same kinds of questions. One can only think of how Kant, even the mature Kant, lets his three questions (What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope for?) culminate in a fourth: What is a human being?

There are many ways to read Kant, though, and there are many ways to read his (or any) commitment to transcendental arguments. I much appreciate Ameriks' work in this area—and have found inspiration in his emphasis on a historical turn. One can, as Ameriks and others have shown, be a transcendental philosopher without overlooking or denying the fairly obvious fact of historical and cultural variation. But one can also have a normatively coined model without being a (Kantian) transcendental thinker. Likewise, is it possible to have a sturdy philosophy of math or logic without being a Kantian.

Herder's stance here is tricky—and I hope I made that clear in my study. One point to bring up here is how he starts out as a critic of what he views as abstract school philosophy. In this context, he does not mention names. We do, in other words, find an intensely polemical criticism of a movement whose spokesmen remain largely unidentified. The same goes for the representatives of Francophile, classicist aesthetics. When addressing, say, the named contributions of Leibniz, Winckelmann, or Lessing, Herder is often fair and balanced in his reading. The same goes for Voltaire as a philosopher (though not as a dramatist). A charitable way to read his criticism of school philosophy (and classicist aesthetics) would be to assume that Herder addresses a philosophical “picture,” spelling out the risk of a certain trend or tendency to identify philosophy with abstract system building. This, at times, bleeds into his discussion of what we, today, would identify as transcendental philosophy. But school philosophy and transcendental philosophy are not the same thing. As I hope I make clear in my book, I think both Herder and Kant, distancing themselves from the paradigm of school philosophy, should be seen as trying to synthesize the resources of rationalist and empiricist philosophies. From this point of view, they do, indeed, have a lot in common, and it is not for nothing that Herder was one of Kant's favored students and Kant Herder's favored teacher. In the period, I have focused on, the two are still fairly close. So why, then did their ways eventually part?

I think it is fair to say that Herder, in his late period (i.e., beyond the period I focus on in this study), constructs a too polemical picture of Kant. Or, perhaps to be more historically sensitive, that the Kant he criticizes is not necessarily the Kant many Kant scholars today want to defend. But his polemics aside, it is clear that somebody like Herder could not accept a notion such as the *Ding an sich*. He could not accept the idea of transcendental categories, nor of transcendental subjectivity. He views language—our forms of understanding, if you like—as historical and as developed in interaction with our environment and with other cultures. He fears that a faculty such as the imagination is always doing its job from within a particular context and thus cannot be entirely free (*Ideen*). An a priori point of view is not given. Universality must be historically gained. Yet, if we look at what the two philosophers want—and if we look at reading such as the cosmopolitan Kant we find defended in the work of Pauline Kleingeld—it is clear that the two have a lot in common. Yet the commonalities should not cover over significant

differences—differences that ultimately boil down to Herder’s historicist approach. Needless to say, this is not to deny that there is room for a basic notion of historicity in Kant. It is just that historicity, especially for the early Herder, but also in his later work, sits right at the core of his conception of the human being—and of human understanding and reason, more broadly.

Now to Pollok’s question about how, on Herder’s scheme, we should proceed as hermeneuticians. Again, I think there is a link between the practical question of how to proceed as hermeneuticians, on the one hand, and the question of transcendental commitments, on the other. Right from the beginning, hermeneutics develops with a twin commitment—or maybe even a three-pronged set of commitments. First, it wants to tell us what understanding is, and how we, at a descriptive level, proceed in our interpretational efforts. These efforts can, post Schleiermacher, be those of ordinary understanding (speaking to our neighbor about the weather is his example), or our scholarly endeavors (seeking to understand Herder’s work, for example). Then, second, hermeneutics has a normative dimension: how ought we, as interpreters, to proceed. Third, there is a transcendental (or maybe quasi-transcendental) aspiration at stake: how is it that beings such as us, beings that are historically and culturally situated, can at all understand others and thus move towards a relative transcending or expansion of their horizon? Or, with the ontological turn of Heidegger and Gadamer: how is it that beings like us encounter the world, at a basic and entirely fundamental level, as disclosed through understanding? And how best to think of understanding across traditions and cultures? As it is, Gadamer, himself by no means a Kantian, at one point speaks of his aspirations as transcendental in this sense. He must, one assumes, have had Heidegger’s reading of Kant in mind—a reading that, in the late 1920s, connected a hermeneutic and a transcendental approach by decoupling the transcendental perspective from that of Kantian subjectivity by prioritizing the A-deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Herder deals with all of the questions above. However, unlike Schleiermacher and Gadamer later, he does not have a lecture series or a book that addresses interpretation. He works, throughout his life, as an interpreter. And he insists that we should think about interpretation in light of the challenges we encounter as interpreters, editors, and translators. He has general advice to offer. Yet we are not, on his model, provided a clear set of methodological

guidelines. Nor are we guaranteed an objective or true understanding. No method can guarantee its own successful application. Moreover, a conscious and reflective practice focuses on the attitude of the interpreter, not on the object interpreted (here is his Kantianism, again, for those who appreciate the relative parallels between them). In our interpretative efforts, we moderns should, Herder claims, aim towards a mix of sympathy, an initial experience of the text or expression as a whole, and a more reflected (historical and philological) attempt at seeing it in its own context and ask what it could have meant there. His is, as Gadamer would say, a hermeneutic model of reconstruction. He does not celebrate the idea of a meaning that grows over time, nor of a fusion of horizon in Gadamer's meaning of the term. It is not that his theory excludes this, but unlike Gadamer he is committed to the ideal of an impartial reconstruction. Why is this? We are situated in our own culture. We see the world from within it. Yet we can know that this is one perspective and try to expand our horizon by allowing our thoughts to visit others (to borrow a Kantian image). Interpretation is a way of allowing us to see the world as it is seen from perspectives beyond our own. We grow through this. Our outlook gains in universality, gets less parochial. However, unlike Gadamer, such gain, for Herder, requires a commitment to objectivity or impartiality in understanding.

In this way, my main point has not been historical. I have wanted, rather, to ask what kind of impulses we, as contemporary philosophers working in the fields of understanding and interpretation, could get when we seek to identify, post Heidegger and Gadamer, alternative ways to move forward for the discipline of philosophical hermeneutics.

Chaouli, Michel

Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment

Michel Chaouli, *Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017, 315 pp., \$44.56 (hbk), ISBN 978-0674971363.

Reviewed by Katalin Makkai, Bard College Berlin

Let me begin by saying something about the nature of the project that Michel Chaouli undertakes in this wonderful book, *Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment*. As a “thinking with,” it is a kind of companion to the text and to the reader. It keeps pace with the *Critique of Judgment's* own unfolding of thought, in the most generous way possible. That is not to say that it bows down before Kant's thought. To do so would be not to accompany, to think *with*, but to follow slavishly. It does not hesitate to acknowledge and to push back where Kant's text strains and to explore why it does so, what keeps Kant from fidelity to his own best intuitions and discoveries. Chaouli's book neither ignores the rich literature on Kant's aesthetics, nor does it allow engagement with that literature to take over or to replace the work that could be done only by its own sincere and open responsiveness to Kant's writing. It recognizes and self-consciously avoids a temptation that arises for anyone writing on the *Critique of Judgment*, the temptation to try to domesticate it, to exert a kind of mastery over it, or to subsume it under established terms or debates. All this means, in my view, that Chaouli's book preserves the best instincts of philosophy. I would add that the spirit in which it meets Kant's thought has a related virtue: one of the ways in which it illuminates the nature of what Kant calls the reflective power of judgment is by enacting the exercising of that power.

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Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment is divided into three parts, treating of taste, art, and teleological judgment respectively. My remarks will focus on its discussion of taste. Kant says that the pleasure in beauty is free, and that its freedom is supposed to set it apart from pleasure in the agreeable, as well as pleasure in the good. Kant characterizes this

freedom as a *Freiheit, uns selbst irgend woraus einen Gegenstand der Lust zu machen*.¹ On Chaouli's rendering, Kant is speaking of the "freedom to make anything into an object of pleasure for ourselves" (xv and 66).² To my ear, that sounds like a freedom to make anything at all into an object of pleasure in beauty, or, in other words, a freedom to find anything at all to be beautiful. One gloss of Chaouli's seems to make this explicit: "I can make for myself an object of pleasure out of whatever" (74).

That would be an extreme view. It might seem to be in tension with Kant's idea that taste involves discernment.³ Further, if anything can be found beautiful, and if there is some sort of imperative to agree with legitimate judgments of taste (if, that is, their demand for agreement is legitimate, as Kant seems to think it is), then wouldn't it follow that we not only can, but *should* or *ought to* find everything to be beautiful? It is true that the view that "everything is or can be beautiful" has been attributed to Kant, and it may well seem to be a view that has to be attributed to him, if his deduction of the judgment of beauty—the legitimization of its demand for agreement—is to succeed. (The lynchpin of that deduction seems to be the fact that the "free play" of the cognitive powers on which the judgment of taste is based (somehow) realizes the subjective conditions of cognition. This appears to give rise to a dilemma, one horn of which is the supposedly "counterintuitive" claim that every object can or should be experienced as beautiful.⁴ Readers of Kant who take him to embrace this horn of the dilemma must then show that it is not counterintuitive after all, or that even if it is, there is good reason to attribute it to Kant.)

But Kant's phrase permits a different translation, on which he is adducing the "freedom to make for ourselves an object of pleasure out of something". (Chaouli does translate the phrase this way at one point, but doesn't mention the change from his usual way

¹ KU V:210. I follow the practice of citing Kant according to the abbreviated German title (KU=*Kritik der Urteilskraft*) followed by the volume and then the page number of the so-called *Akademie* edition of Kant's writings (*Kants gesammelte Schriften*). I have used the edition of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* edited by Heiner F. Klemme (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2006).

² All page number citations in the body of this text are to Michel Chaouli, *Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

³ KU V:204.

⁴ See Hannah Ginsborg, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/kant-aesthetics/>>.

of putting it, or what the significance of the change might be.⁵) Then we can understand Kant to be saying that *when* I experience pleasure in a beautiful object, my pleasure is the result, even the expression, of my activity, activity that I have freely undertaken. This allows that whether an object is beautiful or can be experienced as beautiful is not entirely up to me. Some objects are candidates for beauty and some are not. Whether I can find a given object to be beautiful depends (in part) upon the object, upon whether or not it is a possible site for such pleasure.

I think that it would fit the spirit of Chaouli's book to read Kant's claim about our "freedom to make" in this more modest way. I have something particular in mind, namely the care and seriousness with which Chaouli brings out the riskiness that Kantian aesthetic experience involves. To grant that not every object can be "made" beautiful by us is to leave open two forms of risk. One risk I run is that of not rising to the occasion of a worthy object. The other is that of falling for an object that is not worthy.

Chaouli is by no means deaf to the point that the encounter with beauty is not entirely up to me. On the contrary, he is particularly interested in just such a point. One of his earliest contentions is that my experience of beauty is characterized by my activity as well as my passivity.

Let me begin with the dimension of activity. As Chaouli says, Kant's insight is that pleasure in the beautiful is something I *take*. This is a step in Kant's differentiation of the pleasure in beauty from other pleasures, as well as a key to the judgment of beauty's earning the right to its claim upon others—the demand that everyone else share my pleasure. My experience of beauty must reflect an achievement on my part, my doing something. In the case of the agreeable, the object happens to bring me pleasure. Here pleasure is not up to me, because it simply befalls me. Here my pleasure is passive.⁶ In the case of the moral, I cannot help but take pleasure in—that is, feel respect for—the morally good. Here my pleasure reflects my activity, in the recognition of the lawfulness of the moral law, but it is not free, because I cannot help but respect the morally good. By contrast with both, in the case of

⁵ See *Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 13.

⁶ For the resources for challenging Kant's picture of the pleasure of the agreeable as merely befalling us, on the grounds that it conflates such pleasures with (what deserve to be called) "sensations," see Richard Moran, "Frankfurt on Identification: Ambiguities of Activity in Mental Life," in *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt*, eds. Sarah Buss and Lee Overton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 207-212.

beauty my pleasure is an achievement of mine that is not a necessary condition of my rationality. It involves not only my activity, but my *free* activity.

But although one takes pleasure in the case of beauty, the scene is not, as Chaouli sees, composed entirely of my activity. The taking of pleasure in beauty “involves a play of activity and passivity, for this taking involves both a form of receptivity and a kind of making” (10). In a sense, of course, this kind of claim is characteristic of Kantian thinking. The idea that there must be both activity and passivity is everywhere in Kant’s critical philosophy. Thus, cognition involves what is given to sensibility (=passivity) as well as the spontaneity of the understanding (=activity). Practical reason involves expressing my freedom by asking myself how I ought to act, given the desires and inclinations I find myself to have, and making the moral law my principle of volition. What is the play of activity and passivity to which Chaouli is pointing in the aesthetic case? What, more specifically, does the passivity consist of?

Chaouli’s answer is, I think, that the passivity integral to aesthetic experience is its “serendipity.” The experience of beauty rests ineluctably upon a “happy coincidence” or “happy chance” (17). But this might seem to concede too much to the side of passivity. Serendipity means not just that it is not all up to me, but that it is not all up to me in a particular sense: I am (to some extent) at the behest of chance (or coincidence). The claim that the experience of beauty is ineluctably serendipitous is then in tension with the strong version of Kant’s claim about the freedom of pleasure in beauty, the claim that we are free to make anything at all into an object of pleasure. It is also, I think, in tension with the milder form of that claim that I suggested: the claim that we are free to take the pleasure of beauty in those objects that allow for it. For if the experience of beauty is inherently serendipitous, then even where the object I encounter is a candidate for beauty, my being able to find it to be beautiful depends upon aesthetic luck. By the same token, it is hard to see how the judgment of taste could be entitled to make its demand for agreement, the demand that others take pleasure as well.

Let me make a slightly different, though related point. Kant is concerned in the *Critique of Judgment* not only with the judgment of beauty or (as he also calls it) the judgment of taste, but also with taste itself, as that from which particular judgments of taste flow, or which they express. The notion of taste is the notion of the capacity to respond with

the pleasure of beauty when a candidate object is there. It seems difficult to square the possibility of such a capacity with the ineluctable serendipity of the experience of beauty. Or is the idea that taste is the capacity to set the stage for serendipity to strike, to invite serendipity? In his opening sentence, Kant invokes the situation in which I seek “to decide whether something is or is not beautiful.”⁷ What *do* I do by way of trying to see if I find or can find it beautiful? Is there anything we can say about what the exercise of taste consists of?

Chaouli suggests another way of construing the passivity in the experience of beauty. Namely: It is not a matter of my will. “The capacity for judging aesthetically is not something I just decide to deploy”; “I cannot command myself into it” (148). This is true, I think. It is not equivalent, note, to the serendipity claim: “at will” is not the only alternative to “depends on chance.” But I have some hesitations about this version too. The implication seems to be that I am passive with respect to what I cannot will.

Consider the case of belief. I cannot set out to believe something. It is not up to me to just decide what I believe. I cannot pick and choose my beliefs. And the possibility of that kind of control is not required for belief to be an expression of my activity or agency. Being open to choice by fiat seems indeed to be a mark of a belief that, whatever else, is precisely *not* expressive of my activity or agency. Many of the beliefs with which we most closely identify have for us the force of necessity. If I am to count as exercising agency or autonomy in the case of belief, this has to do not with my being able to believe something at will, but with my taking what I believe to be responsive to reasons justifying the belief.⁸ This is part of why it makes sense to say, as Kant does, that a cognitive judgment “demands” the agreement of anyone else, even though one cannot meet that demand—share the belief that the judgment expresses—at will.

A parallel point can be made about my desires. My activity or agency with respect to my desires does not require my being able choose them at will. Just the contrary, many of the desires with which we most closely identify have for us the force of necessity. My activity or

⁷ KU V:203.

⁸ I owe these insights, as well as those of the paragraph that follows, to Richard Moran, “Frankfurt on Identification.” Moran is there expanding upon some thoughts of Harry Frankfurt, as expressed in the title essay of *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and in essays in *Necessity, Volition and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

agency requires, rather, my taking what I want to be responsive to reasons justifying the desire.

I'd like to point to a different site in Chaouli's book for identifying the special play of activity and passivity in the Kantian experience of beauty. Chaouli says that aesthetic experience depends upon "giv[ing] myself over to something for which I remain unprepared" (xv). Or rather, more exactly, he characterizes the freedom of making something into an object of pleasure as a freedom "in which I give myself over to something for which I remain unprepared." This splendid thought suggests a kind of activity that is at once passivity; passivity that is a form of activity. Aesthetic experience depends upon my making myself susceptible to the object, my allowing it to move me. Taste is the capacity for achieving and maintaining an openness to what lies beyond me in the sense that it is essentially new to me. Without this openness, the aesthetic encounter will not take place. The openness that is required of me involves my ability and my willingness to let the object speak (if I may put it that way), to listen to it in its own, necessarily singular, terms, and to let it awaken my responsiveness. I think that something like this captures an important dimension of aesthetic experience, one that Kant is on to. If it is said to court paradox, then perhaps it is aesthetic experience that courts paradox. But perhaps it is not so paradoxical. Or perhaps such fusions of activity and passivity are more common than we might imagine, at least while thinking in the abstract. To trust someone, for example, is to actively do something, but what I do is to expose myself, to make myself vulnerable. Relationships, including relationships of love, involve trust, and in this and in other ways they depend upon the active giving over of oneself.⁹ There is in fact a deep kinship—and this too is something that Chaouli's book develops—between the experience of beauty and that of love. (There is a remarkable passage in the *Anthropology* in which Kant says that one experiences the beautiful object as inviting one to "the most intimate union with" it.¹⁰ He goes on to say that what is involved here is

⁹ Such dimensions of our interpersonal relationships, and their counterparts in our relationships with the objects we find beautiful, are explored by Alexander Nehamas in *Only A Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ A VII:241-242. The passage is frequently misread as saying that it is the subject making the judgment of taste who extends an invitation to others (to take pleasure in the object). See, e.g., editorial note 18 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 368.

“similar to Eros in the world of myth,” but even before he adduces Eros, the language clearly suggests an erotic encounter.)

While discussing, earlier, Kant’s phrase about the freedom to make something into an object of pleasure for ourselves, I raised the issue of the contribution of the object. I said that it is important to leave room for the object to have a say in whether or not it allows of being found beautiful. I’d like now to pick up the issue of the place of the object from a somewhat different angle.

Famously or infamously, Kant finds at the heart of the experience of beauty something that he calls the “free play” of the cognitive powers of imagination and understanding. The pleasure of the experience of beauty is supposed to stem from this free play. In some sense, the pleasure is due to this free play of the mind. Now, I think that if Kant means that what I enjoy is something going on in my mind, *rather than* something in or about the object (namely, [what it would be natural to call] its beauty), then something has gone wrong. The role of the object shouldn’t be just that of triggering an experience that then leaves the object behind. The object should be the object *of* the experience it awakens, in the intentional sense of “of”: the experience should be about and responsive to it. It should be an engagement *with* the object. (There is textual support for this. For example, Kant says that this free play is a “judging of the object,” even if it is a “merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object”;¹¹ and he says that it constitutes “consideration (*Betrachtung*) of the object”¹², or reflection upon it [or, more specifically, upon its form¹³].) Chaouli is aware of this problem¹⁴, but I wonder whether he nevertheless tends toward it sometimes. I am thinking of his speaking of “using” an object for imaginative work (67), and remarks like the following: “My pleasure has no content that depends immediately on the material being of the object. It is rather a pleasure I derive from finding myself in a felicitous mood” (62); and “[t]he pleasure I feel, though occasioned by something, is the pleasure of being able to feel what, in me, is not the self with which I live every day” (28).

¹¹ KU V:218.

¹² KU V:242.

¹³ KU V:190.

¹⁴ See, for example, *Thinking with Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, 158.

The last quotation brings me to another pair of aspects of Chaouli's reading: the self's self-relation, and the self's relation to the other.

In fact, on Chaouli's interpretation, the self's relation to itself in the experience of beauty is already a kind of relation to the other, because the self encounters itself *as* other. "There is always something that is not mine—something foreign to myself, something impersonal and public—that characterizes and constitutes my subjective feeling of experiencing beauty" (22). This is a take on the judgment of beauty's claim to subjective universality, or (as Chaouli terms it) to intersubjectivity.

There is something surprising about the idea that encountering something "foreign to myself" might be part of an experience of pleasure. But perhaps I am reacting to the sense of "foreign" as "alien," the sense that goes with alienation or estrangement. If I think of "foreign" as more neutrally inflected, as designating what is other to me, then I can also see how this description of my self-relation lines up with the form of pleasure that is ecstasy—a connection Chaouli makes at several junctures in the book.¹⁵ For ecstasy means a state of being outside or beyond oneself.

What about the idea of "impersonality"? Kant's contrast is not between "personal" and "impersonal," but between "public" and "private."¹⁶ (Pleasure in the agreeable is only private, even when many of us happen to find the same thing agreeable. In that case, it is not that our pleasure is common to us or shared between us but that our private pleasures happen to line up.) What is the difference between these two contrasts, personal/impersonal and private/public?

Here is one way of thinking about it. The "im" in "impersonal" serves to negate or oppose. One cannot make the personal impersonal. To move from the personal to the impersonal is to leave something behind. But the public is not necessarily a negation of the private in the same way. One can go public with what was at first private.

¹⁵ See especially *Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 28.

¹⁶ "With regard to the agreeable, everyone contents himself with taking his judgment, which he grounds on a private feeling, and in which he says of an object that it pleases him, to be restricted merely to his own person" (KU V:212); judgments of the agreeable are "merely private judgments about an object," while judgments of taste are "supposedly generally valid (public) judgments" (KU V:214).

Of course, there is a clear sense in which Kant's conception of aesthetic experience involves "leaving the personal behind": it involves leaving behind personal interest (as well as other interest). But disinterestedness is only necessary for aesthetic experience, not sufficient for it. I have also to exercise taste, and this is not exhausted by my setting interest aside. What the private/public contrast allows, or anyway invites more readily than does the personal/impersonal contrast, is the idea that exercising taste may have to do with finding a way to make public what initially is, or appears to be, private. Here making public would mean making available, "communicable," to myself as well as to others. And so the private/public contrast allows that the move to the public goes with a move to a greater union with my self, as well as with others, rather than a divide against myself.

Let me try to say what I am getting at—I realize that it is rather murky—in terms of the idea of self-transcendence. Compare the transcendence that marks Kant's moral philosophy. My commitment to the moral law as a principle of volition means that I transcend my natural self—the "dear self," as he calls it in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, with its desires and other contingencies—in favor of realizing what he calls my "proper self" or my "real self," a kind of higher self.¹⁷ My realization of my real self is at the same time a release from my natural self. Does Chaouli read Kant as elaborating an aesthetic self-transcendence? If so, does it share the logic of moral self-transcendence? In the experience of beauty, am I realizing a true self over and against an apparent self? Or am I discovering, or hoping to discover, that I share some of my most "intimate" encounters—recall the *Anthropology* passage—with others, even with everyone? Am I experiencing the pleasure of freedom from myself, or the pleasure of discovering that it is not only *myself*?

I close now with one last thought picking up on the question of my relation to others in the experience and judgment of beauty. How do I address others when I voice my judgment of taste? I "issue a demand or offer a solicitation, and I do so with no argument to back it up" (54). Is there anything that I can say or do by way of backing up my claim, even if it does not amount to a proof that "compel[s] the assent of others" (54)? Chaouli brings out

¹⁷ For the "dear self," see G IV:407; for the "real self" or "proper self" (*das/unsere eigentliche Selbst*), see G IV: 457 and 461.

the deep relationship between the judgment of beauty and the conditions of speech.¹⁸ Does that relationship continue at the level of conversation (“communication”)? If not, does the judgment of beauty not run another risk, that of violence, in demanding agreement? It would not be the violence of coercion, since there is no forcing or compelling here. But would it be a different violence? Chaouli notes an alternative to “demand” in the line I just quoted: solicitation. This is a reference to Kant’s remark that in the judgment of beauty one “solicits” assent from everyone. “Solicit” translates the verb *werben um*, which Chaouli notes is, or can also be, language of seduction (51). But it can also work as the language of courtship or wooing. The difference I hear between the two is that courtship cares about bringing about mutuality; it would not be happy with the bewitchment of the other.

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¹⁸ See, for example, *Thinking with Kant’s Critique of Judgment*, 59.

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Chaouli, Michel

Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment

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Introduction, title, and methodology

Any work with a claim to originality puts its audience in a peculiar position—the more original a work is, the less prepared the audience is for receiving it. After all, defying the audience's expectations is precisely what makes the work original in the first place. There are several features of Michel Chaouli's *Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment* that defy expectations, one of which is to have approached Kant's third *Critique* itself as a deeply original work, not one simply about artistic genius but itself a product of genius. An immediate consequence of treating Kant's work this way is that it is by no means obvious what one is supposed to do with this text; what is it one should be doing when one is reading the third *Critique* in the right way? And already on the title page Chaouli takes a stand that is simple and bold: the readers ought to find themselves "Thinking with Kant's *Critique of Judgment*."

But surely this praise of boldness is overblown. The title is trite. What else might a reader be doing other than "thinking with" the text? One of the remarkable features of the third *Critique*, one I think Chaouli picks up on, is that Kant actually answers this question. In his treatment of genius, Kant sees that the producer of an original, creative work is confronted with the odd task of having to teach the audience how to receive a work for which there is no precedent. "How that is possible," Kant says with little hint of irony, "is difficult to explain" (5:309).¹ But he does go on to say, "The artist's ideas arouse similar ideas in his apprentice if nature has provided the latter with a similar proportion in his mental powers." Thus the apprentice, or readers in this case, must strive to inhabit a similar state of mind, or rather in

¹ Kant's works are cited according to the volume and page number of the *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, e.g., (5:240). Quotations of the *Critique of Judgment* are from the Pluhar translation (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987.)

Chaouli's formulation, to "think with" the artist. With the attitude expressed in the title of his book, Chaouli is signaling that he intends to read Kant in the way Kant taught us to read original works.

But, again, this kind of admiration seems overdrawn. What reading of Kant's third *Critique* wouldn't "think with" the text? And, again, a remarkable feature of the third *Critique* is that it answers this question by dividing reception or inheritance into good and bad forms. The bad form of inheritance is what Kant calls *Nachmachung* (5:309), a kind of thoughtless "imitation" that blends into *Nachaffung* (5:318), a mindless "aping," when it strives to reconstruct the mechanical production of the work, flaws and all, without any critical discernment of what it means to be in the grips of an original thought. By contrast, Kant describes a good form of inheritance not as imitation but as an emulation, *Nachahmung* (5:309) and later *Nachfolge* (5:318). But simply playing good *Nachahmung* off of bad *Nachmachung* threatens to replace logical distinctness with shallow wordplay. How is emulation supposed to be different than imitation? Whereas an imitator mechanically reproduces the production process, as though it were a rule one was obliged to follow, an emulator by contrast strives to inhabit the spirit or *Geist*, the animating principle that enlivens the mind of the artist (5:313)—which gave rise to the rule. It is from within this frame of mind that, Kant says, the emulator "is aroused by [the example of the artist] to a feeling of his own originality" (5:318). What I am, then, not-so-subtly suggesting is that the imitation/emulation distinction which Kant deploys in an aesthetic context actually provides a working hermeneutical standard, a standard moreover that applies to Kant's own texts. If a first accomplishment of Chaouli's book is to have approached it as an original work of genius, a second accomplishment is that it strives to emulate the spirit rather than imitate the letter of the text.

This is all a highly academic way of making a pretty straightforward point: by endeavoring to "think with" Kant, Chaouli's book manages to defy expectations. Expectations can create a space in which a meaningful conversation occurs, but they can also devolve into bad habits, habits to which Kant scholarship is not entirely immune. The bad habits, in my estimation, include foreclosing certain questions about just what it is one has on hand when presented with a canonical work in the history of philosophy and what is it one should be doing

when reading it. It is possible to see the third *Critique*, like any philosophical work, as an artifact of a certain kind: a record of an attempt to provide a convincing answer to a clear problem. With *that* kind of object in hand, it seems obvious what a reader should be doing with the text: either (i) critically evaluating the validity of the argument, possibly reconstructing it in its best possible terms, or (ii) filling in the historical context to get an ever sharper view of problem the author understood himself to be solving.

Both of those projects are unarguably important and legitimate intellectual endeavors. But the problem in this case is that each leaves the third *Critique* in pretty bad shape. The number of inconsistencies, multiplicities, false starts, bald assertions, non-sequiturs, and suppressed premises gives insiders an interminable supply of busywork (as Paul Crowther put the point),² but it leaves an impression among outsiders that by the time of the third *Critique* Kant was no longer in full possession of his philosophical powers. Despite the best efforts of insiders, judged according to the expectations of outsiders, the *Critique of Judgment* remains a bust.

By contrast, Chaouli's hermeneutical openness to "think with" Kant allows him to approach the notoriously crossed and complex text in a somewhat unorthodox way: not as sloppy and confusing writing about a clear problem but rather as clear writing about a confusing problem. That is, I'm suggesting that Chaouli approaches the third *Critique* as a different kind of artifact: not a dead record of an established position but rather the occasion of Kant's own attempt to *think through* a set of issues and problems, problems that may have been less clear and controlled than Kant expected. Chaouli is thus inviting his reader not to "think about" the third *Critique* but literally to "think with" Kant, to feel the force of a problem, to follow its unexpected twists and turns, and to see how the pursuit of one problem can open in unexpected ways on to others.

Again, this is an indirect way to say that Chaouli's book is doing something different from what we've come to expect of monographs on the *Critique of Judgment*. Reading his book will not be worth one's while if it is viewed as trying but failing to meet those expectations rather

² Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Aesthetic: From Knowledge to the Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

than succeeding at doing something else. That “something else” is to see the text of the third *Critique* as a different kind of object than a storehouse of arguments to be mined for their philosophical currency or to fill in gaps in the historical record. Rather, for Chaouli the text of the third *Critique* is a kind of space: an opportunity, a place to exercise our mental faculties, an occasion “to deepen our understanding of aesthetic experience” as he writes in the first sentence of the first chapter (3).

But treating a text as opening up a space for thought text may be beside the point. What matters, one might think, are results. The relevant question ought to be, what does one find in this space? What does this way of approaching the text tell us that we didn’t already know? The virtue of Chaouli’s book lies in its several good answers to this question, but first we should acknowledge that there is quite a bit that this method of reading won’t tell us. That is, there is quite a lot of relevant and interesting information that is simply not there to be inferred or squeezed out of the text by a patient, open reading. For instance, one thing one can’t learn through patient reflection on the text itself is its historical context: who was Kant influenced by, who is he responding to, and do his positions represent an improvement in any important ways compared to other alternatives available in the late 18th century? Surely Kant himself was “thinking with” others just as we find ourselves “thinking with Kant,” and that implicit conversation with others must shape the text in ways that may not be transparent. While Chaouli does have an eye towards historical context, by design the book is not a dedicated work of historiography in the sense of aiming to provide a genesis of the third *Critique*. It is located, as it were, downstream not upstream of the text as we find it.

Something else a close and thoughtful reading of a text can’t tell you is whether it offers resources for current scholarly concerns. How might Kantian tools solve philosophical problems currently in circulation? Nor does this style of reading directly equip one to take sides on the relative strengths and weaknesses of the various interpretations on offer in the scholarly literature about Kant. While Chaouli’s book is informed by an impressive array of contemporary philosophical resources, it is not preoccupied with positioning its various interpretations within the current debates among Kant scholars.

To be clear, I think careful historiography and the status of contemporary debates are valuable concerns that a dedicated reader of the third *Critique* would want to attend to. There are also important themes in the *Critique of Judgment* that Chaouli's book doesn't dedicate itself to thinking through. For instance, I would have benefited from a more sustained attempt to think through the sublime. And I do think there are times that the project of "thinking with Kant" could have been improved by situating itself more concretely in the current scholarly literature. That is, there were times when I as a reader suffered a kind of phantom pain in the absence of a move to the contemporary literature. For example, I think the discussion of the nature of "aesthetic ideas" or the active role of the "productive imagination" would have been stronger if situated in current scholarship. But that is not because jockeying one's own view against rival interpretations is a serious standard for professional philosophy but rather because there are intellectual resources on offer in the literature that would have improved the ability to think with Kant on such issues. In other words, a project dedicated to "thinking with Kant" is improved by "thinking with others," and I sense there were some missed opportunities to think through an issue together with a community of like-minded scholars. The first sentence of the "Preface" is "We—you and I—are setting out to think with the *Critique of Judgment*" (xiii), but a sensitive reader may begin to worry that the "we" is an unwanted chaperone getting in the way of an intimate dialogue between the author and Kant.

However, on the whole I don't regret the absence of a dedicated historiography, direct engagement with recent debates, or equal focus on all topics. Of course, every book can only do so much and not more, and an author has to make decisions about how to make room for those topics that deserve to be explored in depth. In addition, treatment of those themes Chaouli doesn't emphasize are widely available elsewhere. Chaouli's book enters into field that has been well cultivated, and the discussion wouldn't be particularly well served at this point by another systematic survey or literature review. In fact, at this point one may begin to worry that the terrain has been so heavily cultivated that it can no longer bear fruit. And that is where I think Chaouli's distinctive methodology yields fresh produce. So while the trade-off of following the spirit of a text where it leads is that it crowds out some features that a systematic, scholarship-

focused, introductory historiography would have covered, the pay-off is that it manages to find several fascinating novelties in a text that had been combed over inch by inch.

Before going into the novelties, I want to pause to emphasize that Chaouli's having discovered something new in a canonical text is not unrelated to his method. It is, I think, because his methodological commitment to "thinking along with" the spirit of the text is a different form of attending than the usual mode of scholarship that he ends up exposing features of the text which have been overlooked. In fact, it is, I take it, a deep point of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that different subjective forms of attending will disclose different features of the object attended to. So while it is the attention to these features that for me was the real substantial and original contribution of the book, those dividends cannot be separated from the distinctive methodology (which is partly an excuse for me going on at such great lengths about what is in effect the title.).

Original claims

So on, then, to the substance. The main positive philosophical and scholarly payoff of *Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment* for me was attention to a series of concepts that, by and large, have eluded serious attention. I have in mind investigations into falling (31-5), money (127-30), and snow (251-7). To these to these one could add other themes like *Stimmung* (63-4), existentialism (233-5), and baby-walkers (66-70). What is peculiar about these themes, which Chaouli notices and takes the time to explore, is that they really shouldn't be there at all if Kant was simply trying to establish principles of pure aesthetic judgments and teleological judgments. That is, if you were to take it as a given that the serious philosophical activity in the *Critique of Judgment* concerns whether Kant establishes that judgment is an independent mental faculty with its own *a priori* principle, snow or money are precisely the kinds of thing that are going to appear trivial and unphilosophical. At best they would be mere examples—the "baby-walkers [*Gängelwagen*] of judgment" for the assistance of "those lacking in natural talent" (*CPR* A134/

B173)—but not themselves “exemplary” of serious, adult philosophical activity (e.g., 5:308).³ But Chaouli’s methodological principle is to attend first and foremost to what the text does, not to what it says it does, and therefore Chaouli slows down at places where others speed past. And the result is that we see something new.

To be sure themes like money or snow are not dominant themes for Kant, nor are they for Chaouli. Thus Chaouli’s investigations into them comprise sections, not whole chapters. And I don’t mean to suggest that the meaning of the *Critique of Judgment* turns on a snowflake or that Chaouli attributes to them a special, systematic status. Rather what Chaouli does, which is different from typical readings, is to acknowledge their presence and then take time to wonder out loud why it is that these issues arise when they do. Rather than brushing past them with a shrug of his shoulders he stays with them and thinks them through. It’s a luxuriating style, but one that pays off with concrete results.

Let me say something briefly about why I think it is philosophically significant that Chaouli takes time to stop and smell the roses, so to speak. (The phrase is apt: Chaouli actually does follow a line of inquiry [144-5] about whether tulips and roses have a special status in Kant’s aesthetics). I’ll elaborate with some comments on an early section titled “Freedom, Favor, Falling” (31-35) where Chaouli notes and wonders about the presence of words related to the English term “falling.” Chaouli points to the nouns for “pleasure” *Gefallen* and *Wohlgefallen* and the verb *gefallen*, the active verb for “to please” actively and the passive verb “to be pleased.” There’s also *Zufall* for an unintended consequence. (Couldn’t we also add *Beifall* for the acclaim or approval of a work of art, for instance?) The prevalence of “fallen” verbs has not to my knowledge been remarked upon before. But that may be for a good reason—perhaps there’s really nothing there of scholarly substance, just indulgent word play. Chaouli, however,

³ It is to his credit that Chaouli notices a tension between Kant’s treatment of examples in the first *Critique* and exemplarity in the third *Critique* (66-75), although here is an occasion where engagement with recent scholarship could have sharpened the discussion. One detail the scholarship wouldn’t have sharpened, though, is Chaouli’s literal translation of the Kantian term *Gängelwagen* as “baby-walker.” Although I am not aware of anyone else mentioning this point, the importance of this literal meaning is confirmed by its use in the “Enlightenment” essay where Kant is explicit that the ability and willingness to “think for oneself” (that is, without a *Gängelwagen* of others’ direction) is the mark of having left behind immaturity (8:35). The image of the “baby-walker” is again invoked in “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” as the image of the condition directly opposite to rationality (8:115).

patiently helps us see why there is something of philosophical substance at issue. Here in his own words:

If we follow the path shown by the words themselves, we arrive at the conclusion that the pleasure taken [in judgments of beauty] is an intensification of falling. And does falling not capture a dimension of aesthetic experience? Does it not describe the feeling that, no matter how much favor I might show, the experience itself does not come reliably but is something that befalls me? While the idea of ‘mak[ing] for ourselves an object of pleasure out of something’ rightly foregrounds the active dimension of aesthetic experience, it risks suggesting that I can make for myself aesthetic pleasure the way I make myself a sandwich. The sense of falling that resonates in *Gefallen* can help provide us with a more aptly ambiguous sense of making, a making that sets the stage for a possible falling. (34-5)

Let me say more about why I think lingering upon cluster of “falling” words is philosophically significant—why it shows us something we are otherwise missing about the text and argument. Aesthetic judgments, on Kant’s account, occur in a peculiar no man’s land between activity (the kinds of things I do and for which I can be held responsible) and passivity (the kinds of things that happen to me). Like the activity of applause, judgments of taste don’t just happen to me but require an activity I must sustain. And yet aesthetic judgments are not the kind of thing I can fake or force as an agent; they are dependent on an affective response, specifically that of pleasure. Not unlike being tickled, they are not something I can do to myself. They must happen to me passively as a patient. You may be smitten by a beautiful song or tickled by a funny joke, but if I am not so moved, I can’t make them please me. I can be in the full presence of a work of art, see all there is to see, but the pleasure might just not be happening for me. I can try the experience again or lie about it, but I can’t actively force what I must passively undergo.

Chaouli intones a theme in the Preface (xv) that he’ll return to throughout his book that aesthetic judgments for Kant are both an active making *and* a passive undergoing. It sounds paradoxical to say that taste is a learned activity of passively undergoing an experience, as if the *Zufall* or accident of falling was something I somehow had to learn how to do. But that is really no more mysterious than saying that when it comes to “falling asleep” one has to learn how to let

go of one's worries or when "falling in love" there is a difference between being smitten by anyone who happens to come along and falling for the right person. A considerable amount of our lives is spent trying to master the craft of falling. And identifying words that broach or straddle the active/passive distinction is crucial if one believes that a key philosophical contribution of Kant's aesthetics is to have moved together what are thought to be separate domains of passivity and activity such that there is overlap between them—enough overlap that in some cases one can be responsible for what happens, how things happen, how things appear, how one feels, and so on.

It is by no means clear what we are supposed to do with this Kantian move of integrating activity and passivity, but it is clear, to this reader at least, that doing so is one the crucial consequence of the text. If one "thinks with the *Critique of Judgment*," one will inherit this problem. So it is a testament to Chaouli's dedication to "thinking with" the text that he finds himself in the thick of this issue and that he sees the ways the warp and weave of the text itself should have the readers' thoughts falling in this direction if they let go of certain expectations and feel the pull of problems as they arise.

What goes for Chaouli's examination of "falling" can also be said about other concepts Kant deploys along the way: snow, money, roses, existential dread, *Stimmung*, baby-walkers. Again these are not central themes for Kant nor are they for Chaouli. Rather the point is that they are there at all, and readers would do well to ask themselves why. That Chaouli does so, that he has the patience and fortitude to do so, is in my opinion what sets this book apart.

Friendly amendments

While I admire the practice of taking Kant's hints and openings seriously and trying to think them through, that doesn't mean that I think Chaouli always pursues them in the right direction. I want to end by exploring two such cases. Since neither case affects a central pillar of the book but concerns the details and nuance in working through a rich problem, I hope both interventions can be seen as opportunities for friendly amendments. The first concerns Kant's denial that judgments of taste are interested and, more specifically, his assertion that one "must be entirely indifferent" to the "existence of the [beautiful] thing" (5:205). Early on Chaouli

worries (23) that “disinterestedness” in the existence of the beautiful object is an awkward encumbrance on Kant’s position, and he soon returns to defend the importance of the existence of the aesthetic object (“Being Indifferent to Existence,” 35-41). However, I think the Kantian position needs no such corrective, not because I think Kant was right that existence of the aesthetic object doesn’t matter but because I think it is wrong to attribute such a view to Kant.

First of all, we know that for Kant judgments of taste are object dependent: “the pleasure in a judgment of taste is indeed dependent (*abhangig*) on an empirical presentation ... (we cannot determine a priori what object will or will not conform to taste; we must try it out) ...” (5:191).⁴ So, as long as one cares about judgments of taste, and judgments of taste are object dependent, one cares about the objects of taste. Whatever Kant means by saying that taste is disinterested in the object, it can’t be that it doesn’t matter if the object exists or not. And yet, it’s not so easy to dismiss the appearances of a paradox: given that taste is in an obvious sense invested in the object’s existence, why would Kant say judgments of taste aren’t concerned with their existence?

The first, simplest, and most correct answer is that in the context of §2 where Kant says judgments of taste are not interested in the object’s existence he means “interested” in the two specific senses of “interest” he immediately lays out in §3 and §4 of the text. That is, in §3 judgments of taste are not interested in objects in the way desires or appetites are interested in them, the end result of which is to annihilate the difference or distance between one’s self and the object, for instance, by eating it. Turning around the direction of fit in §3, Kant also thinks judgments of taste are not interested in bringing about an aesthetic object through an act of willful, purposive activity in the way the way a blueprint for a house might motivate us to build a house or the image of a just state should interest us in working to bring about a moral world. Judgments of taste are not interested in either of those two senses, and that is all Kant needs (or means) to show.

⁴ Also: aesthetic judgments remain “tied to a determinate form of [an] object” (5:240); in the visual context we must “submit the object to our own eyes, just as if our liking of it depended on that sensation” (5:216); and in a gustatory case “I shall try the dish on *my* tongue and palate, and thereby (and not by universal principles) make my judgment” (5:285).

But it does certainly look like Kant means to be claiming more when he asserts taste is “indifferent to the existence of the object.” So let me attempt a second and somewhat more speculative response which concerns *what* exactly one is judging in a judgment of taste.⁵ Clearly one is engaged with an object—but not in the straightforward manner of a cognitive judgment. That is, one is not concerned to say *what* the object is but rather to note something *about* the object, something about its manner or “form” that is not exhausted by its spatio-temporal shape. We might say, for instance, that a regular square appears squat, stolid, and visually staid but the same shape rotated 45 degrees becomes a regular diamond with pointed edges which can have a visually arresting effect. Surely there is a phenomenological difference between the square and the diamond. Road signs that serve to warn or caution are very often diamond-shaped (Steep Grade, Deer Crossing) whereas square signs are reserved for orders (Do Not Enter, No U-Turn). Traffic engineers sense that there is something about the way we pose, position, or orient ourselves with regard to objects that accounts for distinctive aesthetic or phenomenological properties the objects will exhibit. But what kind of difference is this?

One and the same object oriented in two different ways can yield two entirely different aesthetic experiences. A square is not a diamond, aesthetically speaking, but what about ontologically speaking? Suppose one were to ask of a rectangle with sides of equal length, what *is* it, *really*? *Is* it a square or diamond? How *is* the object in itself, ontologically considered, independent of our subjective orientation towards it? *Is* it really, in itself, a diamond with a right

⁵ In light of the extensive back-and-forth on this issue at the APA session, I want to suggest a more simple and natural reading of the “indifference” claim, namely, that Kant means to be contrasting “existence” to “representation” (*Vorstellung*). In that case, Kant is making a fairly straightforward point, albeit a weighty one. When it comes to beauty one attends to the appearance *as an appearance* and does not seek to make any moves beyond the phenomena to any “thing itself.” In other words, Kant’s point is not about the importance or unimportance of artworks per se but the importance of appearances, representations, and phenomenality. Unlike cognition or morality, aesthetics remains with the appearances themselves rather than move beyond the representation to that which is being represented. In short, for Kantian taste the matter concerns not the *what* but the *how* of representation not unlike the way Hume argues that tragedy can present events that are, as a matter of fact, truly awful but still manage to do so in a beautiful *way*. This way of putting the point spares a Kantian position from the strange criticism that it is somehow indifferent to artworks; in addition it has the philosophical leverage to be seen as offering a powerful rejoinder to a Platonic demotion of art as merely mimetic. By insisting on the value of the representation in itself, in its phenomenality, Kant’s aesthetics anticipates the Nietzschean view that the phenomenal, the apparent, is itself a source of meaning and value without having to underwrite that value with anything deeper or behind the appearances. Kant’s “indifference to existence” is a call to be superficial out of profundity.

angle at its apex or it is it really a square with a flat horizontal plane at the top? Well, what kind of question is this “existence” question?

I think one way of reading Kant’s denial that we care about existence of aesthetic objects is as shorthand for saying that when it comes to the ontological status of aesthetic properties, such questions are idle, or rather vacuous. My five-year-old son this past Christmas time, concerned about exactly how far Santa Clause would have to travel get to our house, asked if the North Pole was at the top or the bottom of the planet. I told him that we usually say it is at the top, but it really depends the way you look at it while floating around in outer space. You could just as easily say it is at the bottom. Turning then to his mother, my son persisted, but which *is* it *really*? I think Kant is trying to get us to see there is something naïve or misguided about questions concerning the ontological status of orientational properties. My suggestion, then, is that the ontological status of orientational properties is something like the status we should afford to aesthetic properties. That, anyways, is a way of interpreting Kant’s claims about the dependency and indifference to aesthetic objects that makes them consistent, intelligible, and even insightful.

A second friendly intervention concerns Chaouli’s worries about whether Kant’s linking of aesthetic ideas to the outward expression or communication of mental states puts Kant’s aesthetics on a slippery slope to expressionism (188-92). The problem begins when Kant claims that artistic genius consists in “hitting upon the expression for...[a] subjective disposition of the mind that...can be communicated to others” (5:317). Chaouli worries that passages like this one are most easily read as Kant claiming that “art is essentially an *expression* of ideas lodged in the artist” (189). The problem with expressionism as an aesthetic theory for Chaouli, if I am following correctly, is that it runs afoul of some version of Wittgenstein’s “private language argument” by giving an artist access to her own private mental state prior to and independently of the medium by which she would communicate or publicize this state to others. In crude form, an artist would be fully aware that she is in the grips of a peculiar and particular emotional state for which concepts like “sad” are far too imprecise. On this view, an artistic genius, though, manages to dislodge that subjective mental state, insert that mental content into an aesthetic

form, and thereby transmit the mental state to others. Chaouli then offers a refined reading of the text that inoculates Kant from this noxious form of expressionism.

I think Chaouli is right to inoculate Kant from a view in which the goal of art is to express or make public a prior, private mental state of the artist; but I think his execution shows why he is wrong to even burden Kant with the threat of such a problem and the need for inoculation in the first place. That is, I think Chaouli is right to deny that a Kantian account, properly understood, has any room for the purported prior, private, interior mental state out of which “private language” type fallacies arise. On my view, though, he pursues a wrong strategy by making the idea to be communicated a “consequence” of the artwork or a subsequent product that only emerges in the wake of the artistic production, not one lodged in the mind of the artist prior to its embodiment in an aesthetic production. Here is one passage picked out of a dense and rich discussion:

What is communicated to others, then, is a subjective disposition, and the means of this communication is an expression—the artwork. But note that this to-be-communicated subjective disposition of the mind arises *as a consequence* of the felicitous expression genius hits upon [i.e., the artwork]; it is not available beforehand. (191, italics in original)

Thus Chaouli proposes to save Kant from a bad form of expressionism by denying that Kant thinks that the artistic genius has any private idea that guides the making of the artwork. When it comes to the idea that the artwork communicates, artists themselves are in the same position as the audience. They are just as surprised as the rest of us about their artwork because the idea to be communicated only exists as a result of the object created. Hence there is no room for a “private language” problem to arise.

Clearly the issues here are fraught, and I think one can raise concerns about the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of art that result when an artist has no inkling what she is doing until after she has done it. Wouldn't this strategy jump out of the frying pan of expressionism and into the fire of romanticism by making artistic activity totally unconscious? However, Chaouli's brief exploration of “the analogy between aesthetics and psychoanalysis” concerning “unsought and unintentional” activity (166-7) does give some important hints about how one might mollify these concerns.

My specific concern, however, is that this strategy misconstrues in the direction of interiority and privacy what it is Kant means by the “subjective dispositions of the mind” which geniuses are said to have a talent for communicating. If you think of a “subjective mental disposition” as a private interior state that artists have immediate, private, privileged access to the way hungry people might be said to have private access to their own hunger pangs, then you are going to find yourself with a familiar kind of worry; and then you might be tempted to elude this worry by making the interior mental state succeed rather than precede the artwork. However, it won’t look like Kant even induces this worry if you think of the “subjective disposition of the mind” less as a pang and more like a perceptual *grip*, a distinctive way of taking in or getting a handle on something already external and in the public domain.

Here the question concerns what, exactly, Kant understands the “imagination” (*Einbildungskraft*) (and in particular the “productive imagination”) to be. And, to put it mildly, the issue is far from settled. One way of construing it is as a kind of capacity for forming mental pictures in the way you might “imagine yourself on a beach.” If that is the original and, as it were, most fully actualized exercise of imagination, you can quickly find yourself with “private language” kinds of concerns. However, that construal of the imagination’s activity is not obligatory, and I think it is not well supported by the text. The text of the third *Critique* in particular offers a different way of conceiving an act of the imagination not as a kind of picturing but rather as a kind of choreography, as it were, between our perceptual and conceptual capacities. In that case the imagination in its most original mode consists in an activity of mediating between various ways of perceiving and different ways of conceiving the empirical world. On this view, the imagination is not an anterior and interior state in need of an external means of transmission but is inherently a relational activity deeply engaged with the external world.

On the view which generates the worry about expressionism, the imagination in its original activity is an abstract, interior capacity of confabulating fantasies. In that case the communication or expression problem seems particularly acute because the content of the imagination is cut off from the external and public world. While Kant doesn’t deny that fantasizing is a possible function of imagination, I think he sees that abstract mode of pure

interiority as a *derivative* function, not its primary function. Rather in its primary mode the imagination just is an engagement or negotiation with the external world. It is a mode or manner of posing or arranging it in various possible ways.

In that case, the expressivist task of genius for Kant is *not* to communicate a certain something which one sees, with particular trouble if what one sees is a private state. That is not the “subjective disposition of mind” at issue. Rather the expressivist task is to communicate *how* one sees, the particular choreography of perception, so to speak. The “what” of expression remains public: a pair of clogs, lilies on a pond. The question at issue concerns “how” to perceive the scene, how to “take in” the objects, what to “make” of them. On this view, the “subjective disposition of mind” concerns a distinctive perceptual choreography, and the peculiar talent of a genius is to create objects the engagement with which requires or elicits a similar perceptual choreography in the audience. Once the actualization of the imagination is construed less as a private mental picturing and more as a distinctive perceptual choreography, then worries about how to express the imagination’s interiority start to look like worries about what solitary genius invented the tango and how she ever managed to teach it to anyone else. Of course one can simulate the dance steps by oneself, if so inclined, but the tango in the first instance is a relational, external activity.

My hope is that this view of the “subjective disposition of mind” not as mental picture but as a perceptual choreography is not even much of a friendly amendment since Chaouli elsewhere is at pains to insist on the “irreducible co-implication of the subject in the object world...with which we are entangled” (265). And so both cases where I disagree with moves Chaouli makes are object lessons in why I remain impressed with the project of *Thinking with Kant’s Critique of Judgment*. While an open and sincere attempt to think through the problems that arise in the third *Critique* may from time to time depart from the letter of the text, it will not stray far as long as it remains devoted to inhabiting its core spirit. And the core Kantian spirit that emerges from Chaouli’s text is importantly different from what we’ve come to expect. It is one that finds a source of philosophical ingenuity in snow, money, and baby-walkers. It communicates an originality of thought, one that I think is worthy of emulation.

Joseph J. Tinguely

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Between Passivity and Activity:

Reply to Katalin Makkai and Joseph Tinguely

Michel Chaouli

Katalin Makkai and Joseph Tinguely raise good questions about my book.¹ They point out things I neglected or missed; they call attention to insufficiencies in some of my arguments; they bring up issues that I cannot fold into my readings right away. Yet I do not feel thwarted by them, for Makkai and Tinguely too aim to think with the *Critique of Judgment*. What comes across more distinctly than any one moment of criticism is an attunement they show towards Kant's work, the way the resemblance between members of a family often strikes you more strongly than the manifest differences between them. This attunement occurs not in arguments that one might distill into propositions but in the very style of their thinking. Philosophers and scholars tend to dismiss style (and rhetoric in general) as the costume in which thoughts appear and in which their true form disappears. But Makkai's and Tinguely's essays show that thoughts cannot simply be dressed up or down to suit the occasion and still remain essentially the same, for all thinking arrives with a style. Style is not the drapery wrapped around thoughts but rather their very texture. It is woven into the way we encounter and make sense of things.

It may seem as though I am playing Makkai's and Tinguely's arguments out against their melody, claiming (or hoping) that the mellifluous sound somehow takes the edge off their criticism or even drowns it out. But there is no cleavage between arguments and the style in which they present themselves. That is probably true in general, but it is certainly true in this case. The major points Makkai and Tinguely raise, both for and against my readings, are all geared towards the *way* subjects take up the objects they encounter. That shouldn't come as a surprise, for if you follow Kant's aesthetic thinking, it urges you to consider neither the properties of objects nor the dispositions of subjects, but what a subject makes of an object. That

¹ I thank Keren Gorodeisky for bringing this panel into being, and Katalin Makkai and Joseph Tinguely for being the kinds of critics one dreams of.

is the heart of it. And it is exactly where style happens: style describes neither objects (clothing, furniture, words, and so on) nor subjects in isolation from another, but rather the way a subject handles an object and the way an object opens certain forms of behavior for a subject. It is a relational conception.

Makkai and Tinguely start in different places, but their thinking gravitates to that zone of experience in which something significant, something out of the reach of concepts (yet always in relation to them), occurs between subjects and objects. When Tinguely suggests that Kant's confusing notion of disinterestedness can be taken as an invitation to think about the way objects reveal different aesthetic dimensions of themselves depending on how they appear to us, the way a square changes its flavor the moment we put it on one of its corners and see in it a diamond (quite apart from its ontological status that commits us to thinking of it as being *really* a square), he guides our attention away from both the properties of the object and the constitution of the subject (of its "faculties," and so on) to the area where something like what Tinguely calls an object's "orientational properties" make sense, which is to say to the aesthetic encounter between subject and object. Or take the question of what, if anything, the artist expresses with and in the work of art. Tinguely thinks that I defend Kant against a misreading that his text does not really invite and offers a different way of thinking of the question of what is "expressed" in an artwork. I am not sure the reading I criticize (namely that the artist's thoughts somehow find expression in the work, which thus can be understood as an expression of the artist's intention) is so far fetched as to deserve no engagement; it is held by many well-regarded commentators. Nor am I sure I like Tinguely's suggestion better. But I am impressed by the fact that his line of thinking leads him to think of the problem of expression as occurring *between* subjects and objects. Here is Tinguely:

the expressivist task is to communicate *how* one sees, the particular choreography of perception, so to speak. The "what" of expression remains public: a pair of clogs, lilies on a pond. The question at issue concerns "how" to perceive the scene, how to "take in" the objects, what to "make" of them.

The issue, then, needs to be thought of from both ends of the encounter, for in both cases *how* is more important than *what*: how the artist sees, how the percipient takes in the work.

We can observe a similar gravitational pull in Makkai's pages. She zeroes in on a phrase in the third *Critique* to which I return in the book more than once, namely that in aesthetic experience, specifically in the experience of beauty, we feel the "freedom to make anything into an object of pleasure for ourselves" ("Freiheit, uns selbst irgend woraus einen Gegenstand der Lust zu machen," V: 210). As Makkai recognizes, everything turns on how one understands this freedom. It is evidently not the same freedom that is at work in our practical engagement with the world; we do not, and cannot, make something into an object of aesthetic pleasure the way we make cars or promises. Makkai takes issue with my claim that this form of making involves chance, but whatever our differences (and I am not sure what they amount to), the meditation she offers takes us straight into the indeterminate zone between willful making and passive suffering, that is, the zone of aesthetic experience.

Everything I have said about style and aesthetic experience taking place between subjects and objects comes together in the question of the relationship of passivity and activity to which Makkai draws our attention. It is, I think, the knot in any account of aesthetic experience. The problem is not that both activity and passivity are involved in the experience; that is true of all human experience, including of perception and cognition, as Kant has taught. No, the strange thing here is that the passivity in aesthetic experience is itself a kind of activity, and that the activity takes the form of passivity. I appreciate Makkai's efforts at describing this dance of passivity and activity, because I recognize my own difficulties at capturing their strange co-implication.

The force of Makkai's question about chance is clear: if I have the "freedom to make anything into an object of pleasure" for myself, would the intrusion of chance not undermine that freedom? It would if one understood freedom and chance as belonging to two distinct realms without areas of overlap. Yet my sense is that both freedom and chance must be understood differently if we are to have a chance of giving a good account of aesthetic experience as it is disclosed in Kant's book. The term I give in my book to the encounter of freedom and chance in aesthetic experience is serendipity:

Serendipity, while not Kant's term, is the right word for the strangely passive activity—and the pleasurable feeling—of finding something that I was *not* looking for. It captures

the happy coincidence of coming face to face with beauty that stands at the core of Kant's meditation. I do not come upon something I need or crave or even long for without being aware of it, but find what I did not know I was seeking. (Horace Walpole, who coined the term, tells us that the characters in his tale *The Three Princes of Serendip* "were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of.")

Serendipity, then, is doubled: it is by a happy chance that I come upon something that opens me to a dimension that I happen to find in myself—which is to say, beyond the self with which I maintain a quotidian familiarity. (*Thinking with Kant's Critique of Judgment*, 17)

Serendipity, then, describes not merely chance, nor even a happy chance, but a chance encounter that I did not know I was seeking—an encounter that, after it has taken place, appears as though it was destined to have happened. As I argue, it encourages us to think of the freedom involved in aesthetic experience differently:

Since no one "could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful" [V: 215], my feeling of pleasure in beauty is free. Yet this freedom is not sovereign and serene, the way we might imagine freedom in its picture-book variety. If my experience lurches back and forth guided by nothing firmer than serendipity, then this freedom is volatile. Since no rule (which is to say no concept) directs me in the way I relate my apprehension of an object to my feeling of pleasure, this freedom to feel aesthetically is not a freedom I can deploy freely, at will. Rather, it is an experimental freedom, a freedom to experiment with myself. I achieve it "unintentionally," Kant writes and repeats the idea, if not the exact term, twice more within the next few lines (V: 190). If I achieve it "without any intention" (ibid.), then I might as well say that it achieves me. Not only is the freedom in aesthetic experience volatile, then, it consists of the freedom to experience freedom as volatility. Which throws fresh light on the idea that in encountering the world aesthetically I make use of my "freedom to make for [myself] an object of pleasure out of

something” (V: 210), for now we see that the freedom in the making that we considered earlier is just the freedom to and as volatility that has shown itself to us here. Making poetically is making unintentionally, even when all that is made is a certain form of experience. (ibid., 18)

The psychoanalytic conception of action in which freedom and chance, the intentional and the unintentional, are not strangers but deeply embedded in one another can be understood as echoing the Kantian account of the ways aesthetic pleasure happens to us.

By attending to the zone between subjects and objects and the forces that link the two in aesthetic experience, Makkai and Tinguely have validated my sense that a rich account of the passive activity and active passivity stands at the heart of any aesthetic theory. They have also shown me how wanting my account has been and how much work remains to be done.

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