

**THE GREEN MEADOW.  
KANT'S NEW DEFINITION  
OF THE MODAL CONCEPT  
OF EXISTENCE  
IN THE FIRST MOMENT  
OF THE "ANALYTIC  
OF THE BEAUTIFUL"**

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Contrary to the standard view in the Kant literature, I argue that the concept of "existence" is the real focus of Kant's investigation in the "First Moment" of the "Analytic of the Beautiful" in the Critique of the Power of Judgment. That is, "existence" is not a secondary or subordinate part of a more general discourse concerning the "disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment". Rather, the whole characterization of the judgment of taste as a "judgment of an object grounded on a delight in it which is without any interest" shall be considered here as a means to constructing a new definition of the modal concept of "existence". More generally, the four moments of the "Analytic of the Beautiful" contain preliminary work on the modal concepts of existence, possibility, necessity – and, of course, contingency, which is very important because it is required for the definition of the very special modal status of the "maxims of judgment".

**Key words:** existence, modality, aesthetic judgment, maxims of judgment, Critique of the Power of Judgment, First Moment of the "Analytic of the Beautiful"

**Preliminaries**

One of the difficulties that the reader of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* probably faces in his understanding of the text concerns the problematic modal status of the "maxims of judgment" (*Maxime der Urteils-kraft*). In the middle of Section V of the "Introduction" Kant lists a series of principles whose necessity must be assumed, even though this necessity is far from being recognized or demonstrated as such. These principles are<sup>1</sup> (KU, AA V, S. 182):

1. The principle of economy: "Nature takes the shortest way" (*lex parsimoniae*).
2. The principle of continuity: "Nature makes no leaps, either in the sequence of its changes or in the juxtaposition of specifically different forms" (*lex continui in natura*).
3. The principle of unity: "Principles are not to be multiplied beyond necessity" (*principia praeter necessitatem non sunt multiplicanda*).

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<sup>1</sup> English translations of Kant's works are used as currently available in the Cambridge University Press Edition of the Works of Kant. Specifically, I have made use of Kant, 2000.

These phrases occur very frequently in metaphysics, though only – as Kant writes – in a scattered way (“*zersträut*”). The principles are necessary because they are fundamentally normative. They prescribe how we ought to judge (“*wie geurteilt werden soll*”), and they express in this way nothing less than the possibility of the experience of nature. As normative, they cannot be naturalized. Their validity cannot be deduced psychologically or empirically, but only a priori.

The same principles are, on the other hand, *not-necessary* (or, at least, not recognizable as such). They are subjective (like all maxims); empirical (in the sense of dependent on some empirical statements, that is, they are the systematic expression of the unity of strict empirical rules); and contingent, because they express laws “the necessity of which cannot be demonstrated from concepts” (“*deren Notwendigkeit man nicht aus Begriffen dartun kann*”) (KU, AA V, S. 182).

The nature of such contingent principles is unclear. It is even difficult to answer the fundamental question: “Are these synthetic a priori judgments?” Kant gives no table of such rules. As they are not recognizable in their necessity, such principles cannot be part of a closed system. Their constitutive vagueness is signaled through a “u. d. g. m” (“*und der gleichen mehereren*”, that is: “and so on”) at the end of the lists of these rules in the second, as well as the first (unpublished), version of the Introduction. Here is an open catalog, which can always be integrated or even changed in its contents.

These principles are the most clear examples of the very special laws that the faculty of judgment alone, in its reflective (that is: non-determinant) function, can produce. Because of their simultaneously normative/necessary and empirical/contingent character, these laws make clear that there are synthetic judgments whose constitutive necessity does not stem from pre-established forms (the categories), but from another overriding principle: the principle of the formal purposiveness of nature (“*das Prinzip der formalen Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur*”). In Kant’s words: “That the concept of a purposiveness of nature belongs among the transcendental principles can readily be seen from the maxims of judgment” (KU, AA V, S. 182). The purposiveness of nature for our cognitive faculties and their employment radiates manifestly from them (“*hervorleuchtet*”). Kant returns repeatedly to the metaphor of the light. For him, the maxims of judgment make everything clear: not only the distinction between “determinant” and “reflective” judgments, but also the derivation of all reflective judgments from a formal principle of unity, and even the necessity of their deduction.

Considering the evolution of Kant’s philosophy in general, we can think about the following three points:

(I) In the first edition of the *Critique of pure reason* of 1781, we find a set of principles whose function is not a constitutive but merely a regulative one (and which is therefore necessary for all empirical knowledge) in the appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, entitled “Of the Regulative Employment of the Ideas of Pure Reason”. These principles are: (I) the principle of the homogeneity of the diverse in higher genera; (II) the principle of the variety of the homogeneous in lower species; and (III), the law of the affinity of all conceptions which prescribes a continuous transition from one species to every other by the gradual increase of diversity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In the appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic Kant defines “affinity” as the crucial element of the “third” and last deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, i.e. of the transcendental deduction of the ideas as regulative principles of the empirical knowledge. In contrast to the understanding, reason does not refer to objects, but to the understanding

(II) The definition and discussion of the "maxims of judgment" in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* comes on the other side not at the beginning, but at the very end of Kant's third *Critique*. We know that the (second and last) "Introduction" is also the last part of the book that Kant wrote, just a few months before its publication in 1790. It contains terms and concepts, which were defined in a very protracted phase of the work.<sup>3</sup>

(III) In order to understand the meaning of such regulative principles in the evolution of Kant's philosophy it will not be sufficient to consider just the external and more evident structures of Kant's argument, such as the fundamental association with the ideas of reason, and the central function of "affinity" in the first *Critique* of 1781 or the relation to the principle of the formal purposiveness of nature in the third *Critique* of 1790. In order to understand these principles we must consider them in the context of Kant's very laborious and complex new conception of the whole system of the notions of *modality*.

This modal-revolution, which can also be seen as an internal evolution in Kant's system, is based on the substitution of the classical critical distinction between form ("possibility"), matter ("existence"), and the conjunction of form and matter ("necessity"),<sup>4</sup> with a different modal pattern, characteristic of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and which is based on the constitutive oxymoron of a "contingent necessity" or, better still, a "necessity of the contingent".<sup>5</sup>

itself and it is only through the understanding that it has its own specific empirical employment. It does not, therefore, *create* concepts of objects but only *orders* them, and gives them that unity which they can have only if they are employed in their widest possible application, that is, with a view to obtaining totality in the various series.

<sup>3</sup> The part of the book which was written first is the "Analytic of the Beautiful". Kant wrote it in 1787 after the publication of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There are now some disagreements among Kant scholars concerning the precise chronological order of the different parts of the text, but in general the work of Tonelli (1954), Zammito (1992), and Doumochel (1999) suggests that Kant wrote the book in the following order: the "Analytic of the Beautiful", "Deduction" and "Dialectic of aesthetic judgment", the First Introduction, "Analytic of the Sublime", "Critique of Teleological Judgment", the Preface, and finally the Second Introduction. In any case, there is no doubt that Kant wrote the "Analytic of Beauty" at the very beginning and the second (and final) "Introduction" at the end of the book.

<sup>4</sup> This is the most recurrent distinction in Kant's theory of modality. In the reflection 4289 of the years 1770–1771, Kant writes on this point: "*Möglichkeit: die Übereinstimmung (non repugnantia) mit einer Regel, Wirklichkeit: die Position schlechthin, Notwendigkeit: die Position nach einer Regel.*" The necessity of the apodictic judgment is at the same time formal and material. It expresses a legality that does not abstract from the real matter of existence. Necessity is nothing other than the position of the real existence in accordance with a pre-defined rule. It expresses the relation of the object to thought, since the forms of the intellect determine the existence of the object as such.

<sup>5</sup> For us, empirical rules are contingent because we cannot know them a priori (that is, just formally, in their pure possibility). Nevertheless, as "rules" or "laws" they are necessary for us. In light of this "contingent necessity", the unity of experience ("*die Einheit der Erfahrung*"), which provides the systematic unity of all empirical rules, is also contingent. Nevertheless, the same unity must be necessarily presupposed by us, as otherwise we could not have a thoroughgoing connection of empirical cognition in the whole of experience. The power of judgment, in Kant's words, "...must assume it as an *a priori* principle for its own use that what is contingent for human insight in the particular (empirical) laws of nature nevertheless contains a lawful unity, not fathomable by us but still thinkable, in the combination of its manifold into one experience possible in itself" (KU, AA V, S.183–184). The oxymoronic relation between contingency and necessity is of decisive importance at

We must carefully consider at all possible levels the special logic of that modal revolution. In the analysis for example of the “Analytic of the Beautiful” it is very important to consider the following general and systematic points: (IV) the relation of contingency and necessity is evidently the main argument of the fourth and last moment of the “Analytic”, which concerns the modality of the aesthetic judgment; (III) the third moment (concerning relation) of the same “Analytic” contains a new definition of necessity (*Notwendigkeit*); (II) the second moment (concerning quantity) considers in completely new terms the theory of possibility (*Möglichkeit*); and finally, although actually at the very beginning of the third *Critique*, even the first moment contains a new modal definition of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*), which must be seen as part of that general evolution/revolution in the Kantian philosophy between the first and the third *Critique*.

### Kant’s new Definition of Existence

The aim of this paper is to develop the main lines of a strictly modal interpretation of the “First Moment” of the “Analytic of the Beautiful”, i. e. of certain paragraphs which have been seen as unrelated to the investigation of modality. Contrary to the standard view in the literature, I consider the concept of “existence” itself to be one of the main points of Kant’s investigation in these pages. That is, “existence” is not a secondary, or subordinate, part of a more general discourse concerning the “disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment”. On the contrary, the whole characterization of taste as a faculty for judging an object grounded on a satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) which is without any interest shall be considered here as providing for a new definition of the modal concept of “existence”.

One reason for interpreting the first moment in this way is a very simple, strictly architectonical one. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (and even more explicitly in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*), Kant associates the first three groups of the categories (Quantity, Quality and Relation) with the three categories of the fourth group (possibility, existence and necessity). The second (but, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the first) group of “Quality” is here (and in all critical works) strictly related to the analysis of the concept of existence (Motta, 2013).

A second, perhaps more evident, reason is provided by the exact definition that Kant gives of the fundamental concept of “interest”. Interest is “the satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object” (KU, AA V, S. 205). It is only the connection to “existence” which is mentioned in the official definition of “interest” in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In order to understand Kant’s purposes in the first moment, it is therefore necessary to investigate the very particular meaning given to the concept of existence.

Finally, a third reason is related to the general statement I made above, in the *Preliminaries*, concerning point (II): we can read the whole third *Critique* in a teleological way. The “Analytic of the Beautiful” can be seen, in this sense, as a preliminary work on the modal concepts of existence, possibility, and necessity, for the purpose of defining a new modal system based on the relation between contingency and necessity.

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all levels: at the level of the particular given object, at the level of the specific law, which pretends to be universal, and at the level of the formal unity of experience.

Considering the entire structure of the first moment, we can assume the following points:

Section (§ 1) ("The judgment of taste is aesthetic") does not confront the main theme of the "First Moment". It contains only some very general presuppositions of Kant's whole analysis: "The judgment of taste is [...] not a cognitive judgment, hence not a logical one, but is rather aesthetic, by which is understood one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective" (KU, AA V, S. 203).

Section (§ 2) includes (1) the main thesis of the first moment: "The satisfaction that determines the judgment of taste is without any interest" (KU, AA V, S. 204); (2) a first, both very important and yet ambiguous, definition of the notion of "interest" as "the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence [*Existenz*] of an object" (ibid.); and finally (3), an intuitive argument which proves that our pleasure in the beautiful is not connected with an interest so defined.

Section (§ 5) features a new explanation or definition of "interest". Interest is a conception of an object, which finally serves as an incentive for its realization. "All interest presupposes a need [*Bedürfnis*], or produces one; and as a determining ground of approval it no longer leaves the judgment on the object free" (KU, AA V, S. 210). As completely disinterested, "the judgment of taste is merely contemplative"; that means, it is "a judgment that, indifferent with regard to the existence of an object, merely connects its constitution together with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure" (KU, AA V, S. 209).

Between the basic definition in (§2) and the more complicated definition in (§ 5), which refers the "interest" not just to the "*Existenz*", but also to the "*Bedürfnis*", we have the central (§3), concerning the satisfaction in the agreeable, and (§ 4), regarding the satisfaction in the good, which play a fundamental role in the economy of the "First moment".

The first point we have to focus on in our analysis of the "First moment" consists in the following thesis: existence, if considered from the point of view of the judgment of taste, cannot be reduced to the pure matter of experience, that is, to the sensation or to the consciousness of the actuality of an external object as such. If we consider (§ 3), regarding the satisfaction in the agreeable as a sensual satisfaction, we notice that only the last paragraph relates to the question of interest. In the first three paragraphs Kant develops: (1) an argument against the very specific thesis that all delight itself sensation (of pleasure); (2) some very important considerations about the distinction between two forms of sensation, an objective and a subjective one; and consequently, (3) a radical redefinition of the role of the matter (of sensitivity) for all aesthetic judgments.

Here is the strictly modal problem, which constitutes the central aim of the section. The first argument is required for the definition of the second and third one. Agreeableness and sensation are so closely interrelated (at least in words and in the common opinion we have of them), that a distinction between the subjective sensation (in the satisfaction) and the objective sensation (of our knowledge) would not be possible.

(1) Not all satisfaction depends on a sensation of pleasure. In this case everything that pleases would please because of the agreeableness of the sensation it produces. Pleasures would then differ only in the degree of their intensity or in their relation to other pleasant sensations. If this were conceded, says Kant, "...then impressions of the senses, which determine inclination, or principles of reason, which determine the will, or merely reflected forms of intuition, which determine the power of judgment, [would be] all entirely the same as far as the

effect on the feeling of pleasure is concerned" (KU, AA V, S. 206). If this were admitted, all would produce mere agreeableness in the sensation of one's state; none of the labor of these other faculties would produce "any other assessment of things and their value than that which consists in the gratification that they promise" (KU, AA V, S. 206). Reducing all satisfaction to sensation would in this sense preclude the aesthetic judgment itself.

(2) On that basis, Kant distinguishes between sensation in connection with subjective pleasure/pain, and sensation as objective representation of senses. He writes: "If a determination of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is called sensation, then this expression means something entirely different [*ganz anderes*] than if I call the representation of a thing (through sense, as a receptivity belonging to the faculty of cognition) sensation" (KU, AA V, S. 206). In the second case, sensation is referred to the object and provides in this sense a representation available for knowledge (in all empirical concepts, for example). In the first case, sensation can be related solely to the subject and does not serve for any cognition at all. It simply does not provide any information for objective knowledge as such (not even that by which the subject cognizes itself).

Here sensation has to be taken only as a subjective feeling. Through it no objects are known or represented, though it makes possible the definition of some objects as objects of delight. Hence, the same green grass can be seen in two very different ways: "The green color of the meadows belongs to objective sensation, as perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness belongs to subjective sensation, through which no object is represented; i. e., to feeling, through which the object is considered as an object of satisfaction (which is not a cognition of it)" (KU, AA V, S. 206).

(3) Considering that distinction, we can compare two senses of "existence". The first entirely corresponds to the definition of the "Second Postulate of Empirical Thought" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "That which is bound up with the material conditions of experience, that is, with sensation, is actual" (and this is the case of an objective sensation, like that of the green meadows, which furnishes a representation available for knowledge). Contrast this with a second form of actuality (or existence), which does not respond to the material definition of a specific given object. The postulate for cognizing the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of an object requires perception (*Wahrnehmung*), thus sensation of which one is conscious. This perception must be in accordance with the laws of experience. The sensation, which is connected with a feeling of pleasure (by seeing the green meadows, for example), does not require the consciousness of the presence of the object and does not constitute the material correlate of a form of knowledge. In this sense it cannot be described in the terms of the "Second Postulate of the Empirical Thought". We have here a negative, but very important, non-material definition of the notion of existence.

The fact that Kant chooses an object without form (like the green color of the meadows) in order to explicate a new (subjective) concept of existence should be seen as deliberate. He is attempting to show that matter itself should count no longer as the naturally given, to be subsumed in formal knowledge of the objects of experience (as in the "Transcendental Analytic").

I must therefore insist on the analysis of the structure of the text in (§ 3). For Kant, we can (empirically) define the agreeable as that which the senses find pleasing in sensation. If we could now generalize this statement and say that all satisfaction or delight is itself sensation, then — according to Kant's argument — we could not distinguish between two very different forms of the given (i. e., between two forms of reality and of existence). But considering that not all delight

is itself sensation, we can and must make this distinction. The first empirical statement offers the occasion ("*die Gelegenheit*") to refuse the modal identity between matter and existence.

Hence, existence cannot be reduced to a pure matter of the judgment of taste; but it can also not be comprehended into the *form* of the same. Kant addresses that second impossibility in the last paragraph of (§3), and more clearly in the whole of the "First Moment" (§4).

In (§3) he maintains that the designation of an object as just "agreeable" expresses an interest in it, or better: an interest in its existence. But the existence, which is involved here through an interest, is not just that of the given (materially present) object as such (the *tode ti* in Aristotelian terms). It is rather the existence of the object in general, or better: of a specific class of objects. Kant writes "Now that my judgment about an object by which I declare it agreeable expresses an interest in it is already clear from the fact that through sensation it excites a desire for objects of the same sort, hence the satisfaction presupposes not the mere judgment about it but the relation of its existence to my state insofar as it is affected by such an object" (KU, AA V, S. 207).

"Such an object" means here "such a *type* of object". Kant says explicitly that that interest in the existence of the object firstly only *succeeds*, and then consequently must also *precede* the pleasure of the agreeable. The definition of an object as agreeable derives in this sense from past experiences, from the formation of one's own empirical concept of a specific object that gratifies, and finally from the promise of a future pleasure, or better: of a future gratification. "Through sensation [the object] excites a desire for objects of the same sort" (KU, AA V, S. 207).

On the contrary, the pleasure caused by beautiful objects is not related to any general (empirical) concept under which the object is subsumed, and cannot in this sense be restricted by the predicates defining such a concept. Aesthetic judgments cannot be based on reducing existence to the particular form of an empirical concept. They are disinterested because they do not derive from a past interest and do not produce any interest, which is always based on an empirical concept.

More explicitly, in (§4) Kant defines the "good" as that "which pleases by means of reason alone, through the mere concept" (KU, AA V, S. 207). He distinguishes in this sense "the good for something" (that is, the useful), which pleases only as a means for something other, from "the good in itself", which pleases for its own sake. In both cases the good is defined through a concept of an end. To regard something as good, one must know "what sort of object the thing should be", and for that one must have a concept of it.

On the contrary, a beautiful object can please without one having any concept of it. Two good explanations of the "First moment" in the "Analytic of Beautiful" have been given by Paul Guyer, in Chapter 5 of *The Claims of Taste* (1979), and by Henry Allison, in Chapter 4 of *Kant's Theory of Taste* (2001), both of whom relate Kant's concept of "interest" to its definition in the critical texts about moral philosophy. Kant thus defines the interest in the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* as "the dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles", i. e., by some rules of reason. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant affirms that an interest must depend on a conception of an object, which gives the reason for its actual realization. In the *Metaphysical Principles of Moral Philosophy* we read that an interest is present whether a feeling of pleasure is the cause or effect of a desire, which can take the form of an appetite/inclination or of an intellectual pleasure.

In this sense, Kant's ethical writings make clear that interest is always a concept of an object or action, which is connected to a (conceptualized) existence of something. That is, it depends on a formal definition of the same. In contrast, since the beautiful must be the object of a judgment made apart from any interest, and since interest is always (or always involves) a concept of the object (in the different cases of judgments based on a delight in the agreeable or on a delight in the good), judgment of the beautiful is made apart from any concept (that is, from any given form) of an object.

Analysis of the text of (§3) and (§4) confirm this basic thesis: through the description of the aesthetic judgment Kant conducts a systematic alteration of his past modal pattern. This is (or was) based on the triad of possibility/existence/necessity, which corresponds to the triad of form/matter/conjunction-of-matter-and-form. If we assume (and there are very good systematical and internal reasons to do so) that in the "First Moment" Kant tries to redefine or to re-think the notion of "existence", we can then see that in this redefinition Kant liberates "existence" from its reduction to the matter of a sensible given, on the one hand, and from its reduction to the form, which regulates all forms of interest, on the other hand. The definition of the "beautiful" drawn from the "Second Moment" of the "Analytic" – "The beautiful is that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally" – provides decisive support for detaching the notion of "possibility" from the basic concept of "form".

On the other hand, the exclusion of all references to the Kantian definition of existence as the material correlate of a given form leads us to search for a new definition, which must inevitably be based on the new modal pattern of the problematical relation between "contingency" and "necessity". Contingent is for Kant synonymous with "subjective", "empirical", and "a posteriori". From the definition of contingency we can derive a new definition of existence, which is structurally connected with the subsumption of the contingent under a necessary law that is not given as such.

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