

Comment on Milliken

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In his 'The Free Rein of Kant's Free Play,' Milliken focuses on some central difficulties in Kant's aesthetics. These difficulties stem from the fact that Kant both holds judgments of beauty to fully subjective, yet also to be of objects.

We do not merely say, 'I am having a feeling of beauty after looking at certain objects and thinking about certain things.' Rather, we say things like, 'the sunset *is* beautiful,' 'the painting *is* beautiful,' etc. Kant's aesthetics attempts to work with this feature of common language, and even goes so far as to claim that 'in making a judgment of [beauty] we required *everyone* to like the object....' *CJ*, §8. Kant does not say: we require everyone to have the same liking of a purely internal mental relation. This is perhaps what we Kant should have said. In any case, what Kant actually claims is that we require a universal liking of *an object*.

At the same, time Kant makes clear from that outset of his discussion that the judgment of beauty is not at all objective (§1). It is not based in discovering objective states of affairs, or in having beliefs about objective states of affairs. In this way, judgments of beauty are similar to practical judgments concerning the morality of maxims. However, while such *a priori* practical judgments have no intentional relation to objects whatsoever, in the judgment of beauty, the subject refers to her representation of objects, and to the feeling of pleasure that might result from judging these representations without interest in whether they describe the world correctly (i.e., without interest in the existence of an object being represented).

Thus it looks like all objects can be judged beautiful, since it is not clear how one is judging objects in imputing beauty to them. It is entirely a question of judging mental representations that are somehow initiated by contemplation of objects, but that do not necessarily relate to those objects by any universally-valid standard.

The question Milliken poses centers on the viability of Kant's aesthetics, given that there is an *a priori* possibility that any and all objects might be judged beautiful. Milliken is to some extent concerned about the coherence of Kant's account, since Kant suggests that the 'ugliness which arouses disgust' [*diejenige, welche Ekel erweckt*] cannot be presented as beautiful in fine art. More centrally, Milliken suggests that no viable aesthetics whatsoever should allow all objects to potentially be counted as beautiful.

Concerning the first point, there are two ways to proceed in defending Kant's approach. One possibility is of course to reject Kant's claim about the disgusting, while maintaining the remainder of his account. This is a fairly credible approach, as it is not clear how Kant's discussion of the impossibility of an artistically beautiful presentation of the disgusting is at all central to the overall flow of Kant's arguments. Another possibility is to interpret Kant as discussing empirical conditions for making the judgment of beauty, as opposed to transcendental ones. Kant may merely be claiming that in certain cases it is psychologically impossible to take up the

disinterested vantage-point necessary for making a judgment of beauty.

What, though, of Milliken's broader concerns about the *a priori* possibility of judging any and all objects beautiful? First, we have to be clear about the nature of this possibility. As I have implied, there is indeed a sense in which any object could be judged beautiful, given that, to use Milliken's phrase, such judgments involve an exercise of the capacity for imagination, rather than the discovery of any kind of objective states of affairs whatsoever. We have judgments that are 'of' objects only in the sense that beauty is imputed to them; the judgments are actually entirely about what goes on in the subject's mind. Nature, and the human art it contains, only enters the picture insofar as the mind makes use of formal qualities that it does not invent.

However, even if all objects can be judged beautiful, this does not mean that equal amounts of creativity will be required to allow the subject to make such judgments. It may be a creative struggle to see certain works of art as beautiful, while with others, the spectator may apply her creative efforts less to mere discovery of beauty, and more to appreciation of the interaction between teleological judgments and judgments of taste. The second case might be one that is more typical of 'good art.'

Hence, I am not certain why a viable aesthetics must demand that some objects be impossible to judge as beautiful. What would seem to be problematic would be an aesthetics that held that all objects were in all ways equally suitable candidates for the judgment of beauty. But Kant neither claims nor implies this. All that Kant implies is that there is one kind of *a priori* possibility grounding judgments of beauty, namely the possibility that, with the right vantage point, any object could be judged beautiful.

Now it may be that I am misunderstanding Milliken's approach here, in that I do not entirely understand his claims that 'pure beauties' 'automatically' bring about free play; where any object can be viewed as a free beauty with sufficient creativity. Milliken cites a passage (231) where Kant is contemplating two vantage points that are possible when considering an object of dependent beauty having teleological worth. Here Kant argues that one can correctly see the object as a free beauty, or as having the teleological worth; where neither viewpoint is more tasteful. Milliken then suggests that, since one can abstract from the concept of teleological perfection to find beauty here, one can do so in all cases. However, this seems problematic, as it is clear that Kant is talking about an object that is both beautiful and has teleological worth. In other words, Kant has stipulated that the object can be judged as beautiful. Thus all we learn from the discussion is that beautiful objects with teleological worth can be judged as free beauties; and not that simply any object can be judged as beautiful. In fact, this general possibility for judgment stems from other features of Kant's account; and thus perhaps has a different character than that possibility for judgment that Milliken is discussing.

Likewise, it seems to me that one should be careful in claiming, as Milliken does, that for Kant it is always necessarily possible, through an act of will, to make a judgment of beauty. For to make a valid judgment of beauty, there must be a harmony between one's mental representations and one's mental faculties. Why would it be entirely up to one as to whether the proper mental representations are presently available for such harmony, even if every object has the potential for prompting such representations? More than will would seem to be required. The ability to generate suitable mental content, and to judge with a disinterested attitude, are also required. This

ability is dependent both on the subject's own qualities and, insofar as these are insufficient, on congenial external circumstances, such as the presence of a particular kind of object.

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