

What is Orientation in Judgment?: an essay on Kant's theory of *Urteilkraft*

PhD dissertation abstract

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In this thesis I provide an account of the faculty of the mind that Kant calls 'the power of judgment' [*Urteilkraft*]. While there is an abundance of literature on various aspects of Kant's theory of judgment in the Critical philosophy, there has been no sustained treatment of the nature of the faculty that is the subject of the third *Critique* (1790). I argue that the power of judgment is a fundamentally reflective, affective, and orientational capacity that occupies a central place within Kant's account of the human mind. To this end, I trace the development of Kant's thinking on judgment—from the pre-Critical to the Critical period, as well as from the first to the third *Critique*—to show how it continues to gain prominence within Kant's taxonomy of the mind.

The first two chapters set the stage. In chapter 1, I discuss Kant's pre-critical conception of judgment against the backdrop of his German Rationalist predecessors—in particular, Wolff and Meier. For these thinkers, judgment is construed as the logical act of connecting concepts in the mind. I show that the early Kant follows his tradition in putting forward a merely logical conception of judgment, but I draw attention to two striking features of his view at this point, as articulated in the *False Subtlety* essay (1762) and his 1770s logic lectures. First, Kant already prioritizes judgment within his conception of the mind, even before the power of judgment appears as a distinct faculty. Whereas his predecessors see judgments as composed of concepts (as more basic units of the mind), Kant argues that concepts themselves depend on an act of judgment. Despite only recognizing two higher cognitive faculties (understanding and reason), he describes these as nothing but two different ways of judging (immediate and mediate). Indeed, he even goes as far as to describe them as jointly comprising 'the capacity to judge' [*Vermögen zu urteilen*] (2:59)—a clear forerunner to his Critical view (A69/B94). Second, Kant already recognizes the limits of logic, as the science of the rules of the understanding, in furnishing a complete account of judgment: there can be no rules for the application of rules (R 2173).

In chapter 2, I turn to Kant's faculty psychology in the Critical period, where the power of judgment emerges as a third (and intermediate) higher cognitive faculty, whose primary task is to determine whether a particular rule applies in a given case (A132/B171)—a task that Kant initially assigns to the 'healthy understanding' [*gesunder Verstand*]. Notably, it appears in the first *Critique* (1781) alongside (or between) the understanding and reason—all three of which now constitute 'the capacity to judge.' However, the relationship between this new 'power' and the ostensibly broader 'capacity' of which it is a part is hardly clear. To this end, I aim to situate the power of judgment within Kant's taxonomy of the mind. I argue that Kant is motivated by an explanatory gap in his initial division of the higher cognitive faculties, only hinted at in the idea of a healthy understanding. More particularly, I claim that the power of judgment should be understood not merely as an actualizing force but as performing an essential mediating function. In short, the capacity to judge *needs* the power of judgment.

Even then, the power of judgment plays only a subservient role in the first *Critique*—carrying out the tasks of the understanding, but with no special principle of its own. It is only in 1787 that Kant comes to recognize that, like the understanding and reason (which legislate for the fundamental faculties of cognition and desire), the power of judgment as the intermediate higher cognitive faculty

legislates for the intermediate fundamental faculty of feeling of pleasure and displeasure (*Corr* 10:513-516). Hence, like the other two faculties, the power of judgment must also undergo critique. Thus the remainder of the thesis occupies itself with the nature of this faculty, as spelled out in the third *Critique*, along with nature of its special principle.

The central argument comes in chapter 3, where I consider Kant's distinction between the 'determining' [*bestimmend*] and 'reflecting' [*reflectierend*] power of judgment (5:179). There is no consensus among commentators as to what this distinction amounts to—or even as to whether it was present in any way in the first *Critique*. I argue that reflecting judgment enjoys a priority over determining judgment in exclusively characterizing the power of judgment, and thus functioning as the subjective formal condition on all judgment. I reject a prominent view that adheres to what I call a *determinative ideal*, according to which determination is the telos of all acts of the power of judgment (Longuenesse 1998). On this view, reflecting judgment primary aims at generating empirical concepts for the sake of cognition. I claim that this subordinates 'merely reflecting' judgment [*bloß reflectirende*] as a failed or incomplete act of judgment, which is incompatible with the independence of the power of judgment as a faculty of the mind with its own *a priori* legislative principle. Instead, I argue that we should invert this picture: in reflecting, judgment pursues its own ends, which derive from its status as a higher cognitive faculty. I focus on the subsumptive structure of reflecting judgment itself, exhibited in the activity of mere reflection, to show that only those acts that are guided solely by the principle of purposiveness express the *autonomy* of the power of judgment (which Kant calls 'heautonomy'). By contrast, determining judgment is not on par with reflecting judgment, for its principle is always provided by another higher cognitive faculty (either the understanding or reason).

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with questions that arise from the foregoing account, which entails that the power of judgment has intrinsic interests and ends that are irreducible to the needs of another faculty. To this end, I specify both the structure of this activity, as well as what it means for it to operate under the guidance of a principle. On my view, the power of judgment 'in general' should be understood as a capacity for purposive subsumption—a view that both unifies the power of judgment and discloses the significance of its critique.

In chapter 4, I focus on the nature of the transcendental principle of the reflecting power of judgment. I argue that the notion of subjective purposiveness can be understood in terms of three distinctive features: subjectivity, indeterminacy, and affectivity—in contrast to the norms of understanding and reason (i.e., objective, determinate, and discursive). I draw on the notion of the 'free lawfulness' of the imagination—its contingent agreement with the understanding—in order to consider what it means for merely reflecting judgment to operate under the guidance of a principle. I suggest that there is in fact a second notion of subjective purposiveness, more fundamental than the suitability of nature for our faculties—namely, the suitability of our cognitive faculties for each other. Thus what it means for the power of judgment to legislate to itself just is for it to take the structure of its own activity to be something that could hold for the world.

I conclude, in chapter 5, by arguing that we should understand the aims and activity of the power of judgment in orientational terms. Drawing on Kant's 1786 essay, 'What is Orientation in Thinking?,' I highlight the affective dimension of orientation—that is, its link to feeling. I argue that this allows us to see a new role for the power of judgment both as a mediator, as well as in its relation to the method of critique.