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Edited by Dan-Eugen Ratiu and Connell Vaughan

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The Aesthetic Dimension of Moral Faith
On the Connection between Aesthetic Experience and the
Moral Proof of God in Immanuel Kant's Third Critique

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ABSTRACT. One of the most challenging doctrines in Immanuel Kant's philosophy is what has come to be known as his "moral theology" (aka: ethicotheology). In particular, there is much controversy about how to interpret Kant's moral argument for the existence of God, which underpins this doctrine. The vast majority of scholarly work on this argument relies on Kant's discussion of the postulates of practical reason in his 'First' and 'Second' *Critiques*, where he argues that although it is theoretically impossible to know or prove God, the postulate of God's existence is a necessary presupposition for our practical adherence to the moral law. In this paper, I propose a reexamination of the moral proof of God from the *aesthetic* standpoint as it is presented in Kant's 'Third Critique'. In particular, I focus on the feeling of "moral faith" by demonstrating its affinity with the aesthetic experience of beauty in nature.²

1. Introduction

One of the best-known questions Kant poses towards the end of the 'First Critique', which concludes his whole critical project, is "What may I hope?"³ The answer should constitute the fundamental condition for man's ability to act in the world in light of the moral ideal. Put differently, Kant argues that one must hope, as a *moral demand*, that the moral ideal, the Highest Good, is indeed a practical possibility. The point, which in itself is

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² A longer version of this paper was presented at the 'Religion and Aesthetics' workshop at the University of Nottingham in July 2017. I would like to thank the workshop's participants for their constructive questions and comments on the paper and am particularly indebted to David E. Cooper.

³ *Critique of Pure Reason (CR)*, A805/B833.

interesting, if problematic, is that Kant links that practical possibility to the presupposition of the existence of God.

The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between the essential presupposition of God's existence and the ability to act morally from the *aesthetic* standpoint as presented in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. This examination is very different from the common interpretations of that relationship, which mostly refer to Kant's discussion of the postulates of practical reason as presented in his 'First' and 'Second' *Critiques*. There Kant argues that although it is theoretically impossible to know God, His idea having no corresponding object in the world, the postulate of God's existence plays an essential regulative role in giving unity and organization to the world. One problem arising from Kant's discussion of the postulates is connected precisely to this claim, that is, it is a practical rather than theoretical proof, which means that the actualization of the moral ideal becomes a matter of *faith* rather than knowledge.⁴

By focusing on the 'Third Critique', I wish to illuminate Kant's moral proof of God through the aesthetic prism, demonstrating the affinity between moral faith and the aesthetic experience of beauty in nature. My intention is to demonstrate the necessity of the latter for the ability to give

⁴ One of the most popular and amusing critiques on the practical status of Kant's moral proof of God is that of Heinrich Heine (*Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie*, 1834). With reference to Kant's refutations of the theoretical proofs of God's existence, he writes:

"Up to this point Immanuel Kant has pursued the path of inexorable philosophy; he has stormed heaven and put the whole garrison to the edge of the sword (...); Deity itself, deprived of demonstration, has succumbed; there is now no All-mercifulness, no fatherly kindness; no otherworld reward for renunciation in this world, the immortality of the soul lies in its last agony (...); and old Lampe [Kant's servant] is standing by with his umbrella under his arm, an afflicted spectator of the scene, tears and sweat-drops of terror dropping from his countenance. Then Immanuel Kant relents and shows that he is not merely a great philosopher but also a good man; he reflects, and half good-naturedly, half ironically, he says: 'old Lampe must have a God, otherwise the poor fellow can never be happy. Now man ought to be happy in this world; practical reason says so; - well, I am quite willing that practical reason should also guarantee the existence of God.' As the result of this argument, Kant distinguishes between the *theoretical reason* and the *practical reason*, and by means of the latter, as with a magician's wand, he revivifies deism, which theoretical reason had killed." Heine (1959, 119).

meaning to moral faith and, thus, to show that there is a sense where God can be inferred from our experience of such faith.

2. What Is “Moral Faith”? A General Overview from the ‘First’ to the ‘Third Critique’

In the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes his famous sentence, “I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*”.⁵ This sentence expresses Kant’s critical task of limiting knowledge to objects of possible experience and relating metaphysical ideas (such as that of God) to matters of *faith*. Such faith, however, it is not dogmatic but rather what Kant terms “rational faith” or “moral faith”.⁶ The question is how one can rationally believe, and what is the structure of such faith? That is, what are its transcendental conditions, and how is it constituted?

Kant opens by claiming that we *are* engaging in metaphysical speculations. It is a *fact* that belongs to human experience. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he talks of three ideas of pure reason,⁷ contending that although they do not have a constitutive role – since they do not have any possible matching object in experience and, consequently, cannot structure knowledge – they do all the same have a regulative function, serving, as they do, a heuristic end of guiding our thought and action.⁸ Three such regulative ideas are the postulates that Kant attributes to practical reason, namely: “*God, freedom and immortality*”.⁹ In spite of the fact that none relates to an object of empirical knowledge, Kant asserts that it is rational on our part to *postulate* them as “matters of rational faith”. Such rational faith can be expressed, *inter alia*, in a form of faith in God.

But how can we accept this position philosophically, especially in the context of Kant’s vehement opposition to every theological doctrine in

⁵ CR, BXXX.

⁶ See also “practical faith”, in: *Critique of Practical Reason (CPR)*, 5:126.

⁷ These three ideas are: the soul, the cosmos, and God.

⁸ CR, A180/B222.

⁹ CR, A3/B7.

the tradition of philosophy that purported to establish any knowledge of God?¹⁰ For we must attribute *some* kind of significance to God in order for Him to become an object (matter) of faith.¹¹

To answer this question, one must refer to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, where Kant establishes faith as a postulate of practical reason that can be rationally justified by the argument known as the ‘moral argument’. Formulated very generally, the latter is based on Kant’s argument that we have a moral duty to promote the realization of the Highest Good, which is the perfect correlation between happiness and morality. Since there can be no moral duty that it is impossible to realize (for, according to Kantian terminology, the very definition of duty indicates possibility), it transpires that the Highest Good (according to its definition as a moral duty) can be realized. Nevertheless, there is no *rational* reason to believe that we *can* realize the Highest Good in this life. Yet, Kant still argues that there must be a *supersensible*, sufficient condition whose characteristics go beyond our own, a condition identifiable with God for our purposes, with which we can cooperate in achieving the Highest Good.¹²

It emerges that Kant morally sets the idea of God¹³ as an *essential hypothesis* or, put differently, as a matter of “rational faith”. So, the ‘moral argument’ is not speculative, but has a *practical* direction: God functions in it as a regulative idea that can constitute ‘matter’ for moral faith.

Now, if in the ‘Second Critique’ it is *morality* that leads Kant to the idea of God and of moral faith in Him, in the ‘Third Critique’ it is the *teleological order of the world*. One might say that the ‘Third Critique’ is translating the practical postulates of the ‘Second Critique’ into

¹⁰ CR, A592-614/B620-642; A620-636/B648-664.

¹¹ The idea is that our moral commitment does not simply depend on our automatic affirmation of God (or of the other postulates, for that matter), but that we need an act of *free* faith in order to fully realize our commitment to it. In other words, faith for Kant, unlike knowledge, has a practical function through which we more completely bind ourselves to morality. Hence, the significance we attribute to God, in this sense, is not located in intellectual reflection but in our *practical* lives. More on the practical meaning of faith in part 4 of this paper.

¹² This achievement of the Highest Good refers not only to our present life but also to afterlife.

¹³ As well as the immortality of the soul.

presuppositions that are internal to the capacity of judgment itself.¹⁴ Specifically, I would like to point out that Kant's account of the postulates from the 'Second Critique' is translated into the sphere of reflective judgment in the 'Third'. In the *dialectic* of the 'Second Critique', Kant frames the problem of the postulates in terms of the relation between the ultimate good of morality and the Highest Good. The ultimate good *is* morality, but the complete and Highest Good is the harmony of nature (see: happiness) and morality, for which we require, as stated above, the postulate of God.

In the 'Third Critique', however, we arrive at the consideration of the Highest Good in a different yet parallel way: only this time from the side of nature. The idea is that if we think *correctly* about man as the crown of creation ("the titular lord of nature"), that is, as a creature belonging to nature, from a teleological perspective we are then guided through this natural aspect of man, to the harmony or unity that exists in the Highest Good.¹⁵ The question is: how can we presuppose *from* within our position in nature something that is inherently unrelated to the natural order, such as God? In order to answer this I would now like to present in more detail the moral proof of God as it appears in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in the teleological context, and to point out that it requires completion by a dimension that I argue it lacks, namely, the aesthetic dimension.

3. The Moral Proof of the Existence of God in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*: Insufficiency of the Teleological Perspective

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant presents an additional version of the 'moral argument' for the existence of God. However, this time God is no longer perceived as a metaphysical principle devoid of personal characteristics but, rather, as a God who is personal, a moral

¹⁴ This idea is articulated in Eli Friedlander's "On Common Sense, Communication and Community", where he argues that the postulates of practical reason from the 'First' and 'Second' *Critiques* are transformed into presuppositions in the 'Third Critique' through the landscape of the notion of "common sense".

¹⁵ *Critique of the Power of Judgment (CJ)*, 5:431.

legislator who rules the world.¹⁶ Nevertheless, again we are not talking of any pretension to establish theological *knowledge* (such a pretension would be a contradiction of Kant's own epistemology). Rather, we are talking of the human need for the existence of God as a regulative "matter" of moral faith.

After extensively discussing the role of teleological judgment in science, Kant begins to change direction.¹⁷ In Section 82, he points out that we usually talk about things in nature as having a purposiveness that he terms "external", namely "purposiveness (...) in which one thing in nature serves another as the means to an end".¹⁸ Kant stresses that this is indeed *our* way to understand certain processes in nature. However, it does not have any objective scientific basis, because we can always look at something that we previously perceived as an end as a means to something entirely different. It transpires that nature in itself does not contain or strive towards such ends (external). Even man, whom it is customary to refer to as the true ultimate end of nature, because "he is the only being on earth (...) who by means of his reason can make a system of ends", does not constitute such an end from the "point of view" of nature itself (if it can be put that way).¹⁹

The subject continues to ramify in Section 84, where Kant presents the idea of a "final end", defining it as an end "which needs no other [end] as the condition of its possibility".²⁰ In other words, we are no longer talking of an external end but, rather, of an internal one. However, it is still obvious that this internal final end cannot be found in nature, since all natural

¹⁶ *CJ*, 5:444.

¹⁷ Starting from section 78.

¹⁸ *CJ*, 5:425.

¹⁹ Kant has in mind, in this context, Carl Von Linné's *Systema Naturae* (1786), which he paraphrases: "One could also, with the Chevalier Linné, take the apparently opposite path and say that the plant-eating animals exist in order to moderate the excessive growth of the plant kingdom, by which many of its species would be choked; the carnivores exist in order to set bounds to the voraciousness of the plant-eaters; finally, humankind exists in order to establish a certain balance among the productive and destructive powers of nature by hunting and reducing the number of the latter. And thus the human being, however much he might be valued as an end in a certain relation, would in another relation in turn have only the rank of a means" (*CJ*, 5:427).

²⁰ *CJ*, 5:434.

products and events (including human beings as natural creatures) are conditional.²¹

Put differently, in his account of natural teleology Kant seeks to ask not only about an organized being, but also about the systematic order of nature itself: as long as nature is to be viewed as a systematic whole of ends, it is possible to ask about the ultimate end of nature. This end lies in a being that can make use of nature to set ends to itself, i.e. man. But when we raise the question of whether there is not only an ultimate but also a *final* end to nature, we actually raise the possibility of a standpoint from which one can ask why it is that nature exists at all? So, the question arises as to what kind of thing can meet the definition of a final end?²²

Kant responds:

The being of this sort is the *human* being, though considered as a noumenon: the only natural being in which we can nevertheless cognize, on the basis of its own constitution, a supersensible faculty (*freedom*).²³

Kant's argument is that man's ability to act freely constitutes, on the one hand, a cause that acts in relation to an end (the moral law) while, on the other, must be considered as independent of causal orders and of ends (at least according to the way *we* think of purposiveness or casualty in nature). From this, Kant concludes that "if things in the world (...) need a supreme cause acting in accordance with ends, then the human being is the final end of creation".²⁴ Or, put more dramatically, "without human beings the whole of creation would be a mere desert, existing in vain and without a final end".²⁵ The question that is required for our purposes is thus: Is there sufficient ground for us to presuppose that nature is purposeful with regard

²¹ *CJ*, 5:435.

²² Kant raises these questions in the "General Remark to Teleology", see: *CJ*, 5:477.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *CJ*, 5:442.

to *practical* reason?²⁶ Kant formulates his reply in Section 87, which is devoted to the moral proof of the existence of God.

Kant's point of departure is that the moral law necessarily requires that we take into consideration the final end of our moral action. However, in contrast to other ends that constitute a *drive* for action (where the representation of the end causes the action that leads to the realization of that end), the final end is *not* considered as a drive of morality but, rather, is connected to a higher faculty of the will that aims at the Highest Good. Since the Highest Good constitutes an end for man as a *natural* being, this means, as noted previously, the greatest possible happiness for all moral beings. In other words, Kant refers to the internal implications of the moral law and to the final end of moral action as premises of his argument. The question arises: Why does Kant continue to use teleological terminology in the moral context after his repeated emphasis that the moral action and principle are unconditional?

Kant's answer is that practical reason is a *human* faculty and, as such:

concerns us as beings *in* the world and thus as beings connected to other things in the world, upon which this very same law prescribes us to direct our judging, whether as ends or as objects in regard to which we ourselves are ends.²⁷

Put differently, although free will can determine itself unconditionally – through the form of the moral law, for that matter – it nevertheless remains a *human* faculty of desire (even if it is a higher faculty of desire) and, consequently, it preserves the essential connection between will and ends. It transpires that the *possibility* of the final end of the Highest Good is essential for the moral action because, without it, the moral action would

²⁶ Kant argues that the obvious question is “whether we have any sufficient ground for reason (whether speculative or practical) to attribute a *final end* to the supreme cause acting in accordance with ends” (*CJ*, 5:445). For the reasons specified previously, it is clear that it is impossible to provide a “sufficient ground” for speculative reason. Therefore, Kant's question should be reformulated and relate to practical reason alone.

²⁷ *CJ*, 5:447 (emphasis mine).

have no meaning *as* an action, as it would no longer be understood as an action of will. It follows that, in such a case, practical reason would lose its *practical* sense, because it would be unable *to act* at all. Put differently, part of the *meaning* of action in general (including, for that matter, pure moral action, which is not dependent on its end) is, inter alia, *presupposition of the possibility of the realization* of the end for the sake of which the action is done.

However, as noted previously, the possibility of the realization of the Highest Good is far from being something that can be imagined. On the contrary, reality usually demonstrates that the lives of moral people are more difficult than those who are immoral, or at least they are not happier. Kant himself writes that “given all of the capacities of our reason, it is impossible for us to represent these two requirements of the final end [happiness in proportion to morality] that is set for us by the moral law as both *connected* by merely natural causes”.²⁸ From this, Kant infers that natural causality is not the only causality, but that there must be “other causality (...) than that of nature”, a moral causality of a “moral author of the world” through whom the Highest Good can at least be turned into a practical *possibility*.²⁹ In other words, Kant asserts that without the presupposition of a “moral author of the world” (one for whom our free morality constitutes the final end), we cannot represent for ourselves moral action as possible. It follows that moral action, by its very definition as an *action* and as *moral*, already presupposes within itself the existence of God.

The main point that Kant (and I) would like to stress here is that this conclusion of the proof of the existence of God in fact voids the theoretical validity of that very proof. For the presupposition of the existence of God is *inherent* to the moral action. It emerges that, for Kant, the moral proof of the existence of God has no objective validity. Rather, it is a “matter of faith”, as he puts it.³⁰

“Faith” Kant writes:

²⁸ *CJ*, 5:450 (parentheses mine).

²⁹ *Ibid*; *CJ*, 5:453.

³⁰ *CJ*, 5:496.

is reason's moral *way of thinking* [*Denkungsart*] in the affirmation of that which is inaccessible for theoretical cognition. It is thus the constant fundamental principle of the mind *to assume as true* that which it is necessary to *presuppose* as a condition for the possibility of the highest moral final end, on account of the obligation to that [end], although we can have no insight into its possibility or into its impossibility.³¹

And Kant clarifies this in a footnote:

For a final end cannot be commanded by any law of reason without reason simultaneously promising its attainability, even if uncertainly.³²

Kant argues that even though we cannot *know* (with certainty) whether the end of the Highest Good is indeed practically possible, we must at least be capable of *believing* that the correlation between happiness and morality in the Highest Good can be realized.³³ But on what is this belief grounded? Or, put differently, how can the Highest Good be understood from the outset in terms of possibility (possibility in the sense of realizability) if, on the one hand, it is impossible to provide it with any 'ontological horizon', yet on the other it must still be a real rational possibility due to its very imposition as a moral *demand*?

One answer I would like to put forward (without developing it) is that it is our very *inability* to know the Highest Good with certainty that opens the space of possibility for its realization. This is to some extent to paraphrase Kant's assertion that knowledge must be limited in order to make room for faith, albeit with the emphasis that it is *precisely* this epistemological certainty that *limits* faith, in the sense that it restricts the potential for progress.³⁴

³¹ *CJ*, 5:471-472 (emphases mine).

³² *CJ*, 5:471' (emphases mine).

³³ Notice that Kant's distinction between reason and knowledge allows faith to take part in rational activity in a manner that is not only opposed to it but is also central to the notion of reason itself.

³⁴ A similar idea can be found in Eli Friedlander's "Logic, Ethics and Existence in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*", which takes certainty as something that cannot be questioned.

The second answer I would like to put forward leans on Kant's own wording in the above citation, relating to faith as a "way of thinking". In other words, what is important here is not the *thing* that we presuppose but, rather, the *way* in which we presuppose it. The main point is that when we adopt that same "reason's moral way of thinking" – that is, when we believe in the possibility of the Highest Good – we in fact adopt a *reflective* way of thinking, since it is a matter of the way that we decide how to think about *ourselves*.³⁵

It can be said that belief in the highest good in fact constitutes an expression of faith in our rational abilities as creatures that do not act solely on the basis of natural desires and inclinations but, rather, *also* on the basis of practical reason. However, for this faith to actually "work", that is, for the presupposition of the possibility of the Highest Good to convince us, it must be somehow connected to the way we think about ourselves *within* the natural world. For after all, although we can indeed decide to believe in the Highest Good, if we do not manage to *imagine* ourselves progressing towards it, this faith will not be able to turn into a rational possibility for us. This does not mean that we can create a representation of the Highest Good in our imagination, nor that the presupposition of God's existence should involve imagining a being that has the capacity to apportion happiness to the virtuous. Rather it should be viewed as pertaining to the very possibility of the practical dimension of the Highest Good. A pronounced place where such a way of reflective thinking finds expression is in our *aesthetic* experience of beauty in nature. I will now seek, in the last part of this paper, to show how the aesthetic experience of beauty in nature is required for the possibility of giving *meaning* to moral faith.

4. The Aesthetic Dimension of Moral Faith

In a footnote towards the end of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,

Yet, according to Wittgenstein's account the unquestionable "shows itself; it is the mystical" (T, 6.522), while for Kant certainty is exactly what *can* have a conceptual determination.

³⁵ Here it is clear that Kant's characterizes faith as a rational activity.

Kant points at the intimacy between the feeling of veneration that we experience with regard to beauty in nature and religious feeling. He writes:

The admiration of the beauty as well as the emotion aroused by the so diverse ends of nature, which a reflective mind is able to feel even *prior* to any clear representation of a rational author of the world, have something similar to a *religious* feeling about them. Hence they seem to act on the mind, by means of a kind of judging that is *analogous* to the moral, primarily through the *moral feeling* (of *gratitude and veneration toward the cause that is unknown to us*).³⁶

Although Kant repeatedly stresses the rational character of faith, we must still bear in mind that we are talking of a feeling that belongs to theological space (see: “*religious feeling*”). Since this faith cannot be established theoretically, it transpires that the only way it can be understood is by *analogy*. Here, Kant argues that an analogy exists between our perception of nature as beautiful or purposeful and between our moral structure. This analogy is based on feelings that arise in us when we judge nature reflectively and *also* when we think about moral ideas (the Highest Good, and the idea of God for that matter).

The point is that, in fact, the analogy makes it possible for us to make a connection between *structures of thinking* that arise out of the feelings of the aesthetic judgment of beauty in nature and those that arise out of the moral feelings of reason, and this because the analogy between them is founded on the *emotional (gefühl)* basis that each of them has as an *activity* of the mind.³⁷ Moral faith, as a moral feeling, constitutes a principle

³⁶ *CJ*, 5:482’ (the emphases in italic only are mine).

³⁷ From a broader perspective, it can be argued that the very analogy between the aesthetic and moral dimensions, being articulated in terms of emotion, in fact stresses the aesthetic element upon which the two parts of the ‘Third Critique’ are based. For the emotion that constitutes the aesthetic judgment is analogous to the emotion that entertains the possibility of the ultimate end of practical reason. In addition, one can say that Kant’s very use of *analogy* as the mediating link between the two dimensions - moral and aesthetic - indicates that this link itself is based on the principle of reflective judgment since the basic meaning of analogy in general lies in the *same* rule of *reflection* being aimed at two different things. For more on the centrality of aesthetic elements to the ‘Third Critique’ as a whole, see: Gary Banham, 2000, 188-195.

of action for the possibility of the realization of the Highest Good by presupposing the existence of God as a supersensible being that can make the connection between the effects of nature and our freedom. At the same time, aesthetic feeling is part of the activity of reflective judgment of beauty in nature that demonstrates the free play between our faculties of cognition with regard to that same nature.³⁸ It emerges that the analogy makes it possible for us to give meaning – call it “practical meaning” – to something that cannot be recognized or known theoretically.

Yet, why precisely does our aesthetic experience of beauty in nature contribute to our moral faith in the Highest Good by giving it a practical meaning? And is an analogy the most we can hope for or can we truly conceive of the field of aesthetic experience of beauty as that wherein the prefiguration of such realized unity that we strive for in the Highest Good can be exhibited?³⁹

Beyond the pure formal stage of reflection that both experiences – the moral and the aesthetic – share, which constitutes the preliminary condition for the analogy between them, the point is that our aesthetic experience of beauty in nature *is* a preparation for moral faith, and reinforces it. Kant stresses in the above citation that we can have feelings of a religious nature (such as “admiration of the beauty [of nature]”) even “*prior* to any clear representation of a rational author of the world”. In other words, our aesthetic experience of nature is *prior* to our presupposition regarding the existence of God, and is also accompanied by something similar in structure to the feeling of faith.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that Kant is talking here about the feeling experienced by us with regard to the beauty of nature as well as

³⁸ One can recall, in this context, one of Kant’s famous sentences from Section 59, “On Beauty as a Symbol of Morality”, in which he describes the analogy between the aesthetic and moral dimension in terms of emotion: “we often designate beautiful objects of nature or of art with names that seem to be grounded in a moral judging. We call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent (...); even colors are called innocent, modest or tender, because they arouse sensations that contain something analogical to the consciousness of a mental state produced by moral judgments” (*CJ*, 5:354).

³⁹ These questions arise even more in relation to Section 59, in which Kant, by placing beauty as a “symbol of morality”, explicitly claims that there is an analogy between judgments of beauty in nature and between moral judgments (*CJ*, 5:351).

that aroused in us by the diverse ends of nature. He seems to be seeking to indicate two main characteristics of reflective judgment that make it possible both to find beauty in nature and to freely place ends in it as *constructive human activities*. The main point is that these reflective activities make it possible for us to be *responsive* to the natural world by way of the ability to *reorganize* the natural order of which we ourselves are part.⁴⁰

Reformulating this in theological terms, it may be said that our ability for reflection both about ourselves as well as about nature opens before us the possibility of constructing ourselves as moral human beings by way of our ability to *believe* in the potential of the Highest Good as an expression of our own rational abilities. This faith finds expression in the form of a feeling “of gratitude and veneration toward the cause that is unknown to us”. Kant does not specify here what that “cause” is. However, based on the interpretation I have offered, it can be attributed, firstly, to the idea of God, to that “moral author of the world” whose existence we are required to presuppose practically so that the highest end of morality can be realized despite, or more precisely, due to the fact that we can never know it. However, that same “cause that is unknown to us” can also be attributed to the *fact of reason itself* (here the reference is to practical reason), which constitutes our ability to free ourselves from being subjected to laws that restrict us in the natural world, and to act with regard to the moral end towards which we have a feeling of “gratitude and veneration”.

Support for this last conclusion can be found in the *dialectic* of the ‘Second Critique’, where, with reference to the moral end of the Highest Good, Kant argues:

the furthering of this good and therefore the presupposition of its possibility are objectively necessary (though only as a consequence of practical reason); but *the manner* as to how we want to think it as possible rests within our choice, in which however a *free interest* of

⁴⁰ This argument is best articulated through the idea of ‘Culture’ (CJ, 5:430-43), see my “The Final End of Imagination” (*Filosofia Unisinos: Unisinos Journal of Philosophy*; forthcoming).

pure practical reason decides for the assumption of a wise originator of the world. [Therefore] the principle which determines our judgment in this is (...) a *pure practical rational faith*.⁴¹

Since practical faith is *not* directed towards the Highest Good as an “object” but, rather, as an end of our moral needs and of our abilities – in other words, the main thing here is the *modality* of our faith, or the way in which it is constituted – it transpires that the *very demand* to presuppose the Highest Good as a real possibility is what is described as necessary. We have the choice “as to how we want to think it as possible”, part of this way of thinking being connected to the presupposition of the existence of God (“wise originator of the world”).

In other words, Kant’s claim is that our rational essence has to be realized in what we make of ourselves through what we do and how we live. We are in fact called to make ourselves compatible or worthy for our *own* essential rationality. Ultimately, we do this by preparing ourselves for moral ends, which is cultivating morality within ourselves.

Connecting all this to the matter at hand in the ‘Third Critique’, it can be said that we need a form of judgment – or a “way of thinking”, for that matter – in order to enhance our cognition of our limitations as creatures who *also* act according to natural desires and inclinations, in order to create the basis for faith in our rational abilities to act according to practical reason. This means, as said, the reflective way of thinking that is not directed to determining the object (in the present context, the Highest Good) but, rather, to the ability of the subject to presuppose it as a rational principle according to which it is possible to act.

“Therefore”, Kant concludes “this faith is not commanded; rather, as a voluntary determination of our judgment, conducive to the moral (commanded) aim (...), it has itself arisen from the *moral attitude*” (*der moralischen Gesinnung*, which also means “moral sentiment/disposition”).⁴² It is a self-directed attitude that is articulated in the form of the feeling of faith as a way of thinking, in which we must choose so it can be compatible

⁴¹ *CPR*, 5:145-146 (emphases mine).

⁴² *Ibid.*

to our moral ends. This is not to say that we may indulge in idle wishful thinking (as if I wish that today is Sunday even though its Thursday), but that we have to truly believe and to commit ourselves to this faith.

Stated differently, this faith is a construction of conditions of possibility that are being articulated in the structure of faith (or hope, for that matter). This means that we have to cultivate our moral abilities in order to realize them. This is not done by inclinations of some kind but rather we must commit ourselves, as stated above, through what we do and more importantly through *how* we do it.⁴³

To return, in light of this, to the analogy previously drawn between the aesthetic experience of nature and moral faith, we can now understand the aesthetic experience of nature as giving practical meaning to faith in terms of being propaedeutic to the *manner* in which we are obligated to choose (freely) to believe in the supreme moral end of the Highest Good *as* a real possibility.⁴⁴

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⁴³ Let us recall that morality, according to Kant, is fitness for morally obligatory ends. This assertion indicates the idea I wish to allude, i.e. that morality is integral to human nature and that it is reflected in the person’s character or attitudes.

⁴⁴ Cf. Kant’s observation in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (*Rel.*) that pure rational faith is a feeling that can be reached by the aid of historical faith, specifically in the form of rituals and symbols that satisfy human “natural need” by giving them “something that the senses can hold on to” (*Rel.*, 6:109).

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