The Good of the Beautiful

by

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For every Dreamer who, with child-like faith,

chooses to leap into beautiful chaos
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Abstract

In this thesis I enter the aesthetic dialogue by way of a Kantian definition of beauty. I consider a beauty that is foundationally Kantian (in its freedom and universality) and effectually Romantic (in its relation to human sociability and possibility). In short, I argue that the human encounter with the beautiful touches all minds in a way that prepares all people to progress personally and commune socially in the world. Beauty impresses and enriches our internal interstices, and we are aware of the wonder of our being. As we are altered by beauty, we simultaneously alter the larger universe in ways that are empowering, reproductive, restorative, and good.

We begin to investigate the relationship between beauty and goodness with Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Judgment, as it is Kant’s definition of beauty that grounds this exploration of beauty’s function and force in the world. How Kant defines and describes the beautiful provides the basis for Chapter One of this thesis. It is the Kantian concept of universal subjectivity—the shared human experience of beauty—that propels us toward the productivity of beauty. With this aesthetic connection that is valid for all people, Kant would seem to uncover a commonality that might also be wielded to move all people. Kant, however, does not pursue the implications of his proposed beauty.

Others do. Chapter Two continues with a detailed look at beauty’s transformative process at the level of the individual. Whereas Kant contains the influence of beauty to mere personal pleasure in reflection and contemplation, others avow that beauty reforms the mind and, likewise, the person. In theories that similarly converge on the essentialness of beauty, writers like Percy Bysshe Shelley, Elaine Scarry, Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich Schiller, and Ralph Waldo Emerson assert that beauty dynamically refreshes, enlarges, and improves our minds. With such conceptual resources as the above, I examine how beauty revamps each mind inwardly and repositions each person externally in a process that enlivens and sustains all things.

The final chapter moves from the personal implications of beauty to its effect on collective humanity and the cosmos. As beauty inspires an inward stripping and renewal of self, beauty also urges that same self to participate in the regeneration and re-creation of the universe. The transformative ripple initiated by beauty moves from the one to the many by way of the transformed person, who changes the contours of the world. Scarry writes that beauty “comes to us, with no work of our own; then leaves us prepared to undergo a giant labor” (53). Alike are we graced by beauty, and alike are we charged to make all things new. Beauty universally prompts us to live purposeful lives that include and transcend ourselves; all of us can choose to live by Beauty’s overflow.
Man is broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue.

Contents

Short Titles  

Introduction  

Chapter One  

Categories of Judgment  

Purposiveness Without Purpose  

What is Beauty?  

Beauty Prophesies  

Chapter Two  

Once in the Mind  

The Transformative Process  

The Melody  

Dynamic Relation  

Beauty Permits the Social  

Chapter Three  

The Harmony  

The Exhortation  

Conclusion  

Works Consulted  

Short Titles


Introduction

I have, then, your gracious permission to submit the results of my inquiry concerning Art and Beauty in the form of a series of letters. Sensible as I am of the gravity of such an undertaking, I am also alive to its attraction and its worth. I shall be treating of a subject which has a direct connexion with all that is best in human happiness, and no very distant connexion with what is noblest in our moral nature. I shall be pleading the cause of Beauty before a heart which is as fully sensible of her power as it is prompt to act upon it, a heart which, in an inquiry where one is bound to invoke feelings no less often than principles, will relieve me of the heaviest part of my labours.

—Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man 1

Approaching Beauty

Write your own definition of beauty and be ready to share it in class on Thursday. This was the assignment following the first day of class: To gather up centuries of unresolved dialogue and detangle it into a short string of coherent sentencing. The ambitious aim of the undergraduate History of Criticism course in the English Department read as follows:

What is the difference between a committed, as opposed to an autonomous, art—and why is it important? This double question will frame the course, which will focus on the relationship between art and literature, and in particular the idea of
beauty. We will consider how writings on beauty might form part of and help to illuminate social and political discussions about the relationship between individual and government, society and state. And we will also explore the relationship between political theories and ideas about beauty through the ages, examining some of the key strains of intellectual thought (e.g. humanism, liberalism, republicanism) and discussing the extent to which these notions inform or contest accounts of the purpose and value of beauty in society. (Hartley)

Unaware of the dispute into which I was about to enter—the aesthetic argument that has forever been coupled with the aspirations of man—I offered my own interpretation to the question, *What is beauty?* I speculated: "Beauty is the ability to perceive something beyond our nature—which is limited and fallible. Beauty is a glimpse of perfection, of the eternal, of the indestructible." Inherent in my hasty intuition of beauty is an assumption that, many theorists and texts later, we will explore here—namely, that beauty is of enduring worth in the world. I argue that it is.

What good is beauty? Though the specific value of beauty has always been disputed, the fact that beauty indeed has value used to be evident beyond argumentation. In the *Symposium*, Plato asserts through the character Diotima that: “human life should be lived, gazing on beauty itself . . . [man] will be turned towards the great sea of beauty and gazing on it he’ll give birth, through a boundless love of knowledge, to many beautiful and magnificent discourses and ideas . . . Don’t you realize,” she said, “that it’s only in that kind of life, when
someone sees beauty with the part that can see it, that he'll be able to give birth
not just to images of virtue . . . but to true virtue.” (61, 60, 62)

The force of beauty was believed to compel mankind to virtue; beauty moved us to
pursue goodness and rightness within the universe. Life was spent in the presence of
beauty, if only because the prolonged pleasure we received as a result undoubtedly
made us better people. In Only a Promise of Happiness, Alexander Nehamas reports that
"Plato and the ancients were not afraid of the risky language of passion because they
thought that beauty, even the beauty of lowly objects, can gradually inspire a longing
for goodness and truth” (2). Beauty aided us as we aspired toward universal awareness
and wholeness, toward continuity and happiness. Nehamas avows: “Passion in
pursuing that life, its wisdom and virtue, and everything that leads to them, is just what
the ancients encouraged and valued, and the pleasures they promised in return were
vivid and intense” (2). At that time, the value of beauty was assumed. That beauty, in
some capacity, held a dynamic, life-affirming significance was not questioned.

Entertained by such ancients as Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and Plotinus, such
philosophers as Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche, and such critical theorists as Burke, Hegel,
Arnold, and Adorno, the topic of beauty has undergone a seeming but never
satisfactory exhaustion. To explore beauty is to take on indefinite mystery. The
centuries of deviations from the above Platonic certainty declare this reality.

Beginning in the 1700s, though, with the interpretations and applications of
Immanuel Kant’s foundational work on the human mind and the aesthetic, Platonic
assumptions ceased to be axiomatic or even desired premises. Nehamas writes that
with the radical evolution of beauty that thinkers like Arthur Schopenhauer directed, there seemed to be an irreparable “breach between beauty and morality” and there “opened an unbridgeable chasm between beauty and the will [that] gained absolute dominion over art” (3, 13). From that point, eerie divisions began to appear, separating beauty from aesthetic value, desire from disinterest, autonomy from aspiration, and utility from uselessness. Nehamas writes that “beauty had long ago ceased to go hand and hand with wisdom and goodness; it had eventually come to be, as it is to most of the world today, largely irrelevant and often opposed to them” (3). In On Beauty and Being Just, Elaine Scarry acknowledges that the experience and pursuit of beauty do indeed contain a certain “liability to error, contestation, and plurality—for which [it] over the centuries has so often been belittled—[which] has sometimes been cited as evidence of its falsehood and distance from ‘truth’” (52-53). She later echoes Nehamas when she says that beauty has been “banished” from the humanities, and that we now “speak about . . . beauty only in whispers” (57).

At best, beauty is said to be innocuous or inconsequential and, at worst, excessive or violent. In his 2007 essay “Towards a Critique of Violence,” Dominick LaCapra calls attention to disturbing trends in which we aestheticize such trauma and terror as the “killing of Laius by Oedipus, . . . the crucifixion of Christ, . . . and the more abstract idea of the death of God who, as Nietzsche contends, was killed by us as the inaugural moment of modernity” (3-4). LaCapra sees this tendency even with the more recent “9/11 (September 11, 2001)” tragedy, as the event was quickly given “apocalyptic status” as a “foundational trauma or even a conversion experience” (4). As our world
begins to justify violence in a way that transcends human ethics and responsibility, LaCapra writes that "[c]ertain theorists (at times themselves taking a formalistic or aestheticizing turn) may even conjoin trauma and violence conceptually and evaluatively in a manner that construes them as ecstatic experiences of the sublime or as sacralizing, redemptive, or foundational forces" (4, 3). Unspeakable means achieve ends that are merely speculative—such as collective purification—as violence amalgamates with the aesthetic in horrific ways. Nehamas records Barnett Newman, who, in 1948, "said it all in one famous sentence: ‘The impulse of modern art was to destroy beauty’” (13).

How far have we traveled from Diotima’s argumentative appeal concerning the value and function of beauty? Thousands of years ago, Plato wrote, “‘[L]ove is the desire to have the good forever . . .’ In what way and in what type of action must people pursue this goal, if the enthusiasm and intensity they show in this pursuit is to be called love? . . . I shall tell you . . . Love’s function is giving birth in beauty both in body and in mind’” (Symposium 53). This is the kind of beauty that I imagined when I first defined it, unfathomably good. This is the kind of beauty—active, passionate, participatory—in whose definition I felt resonance with my very being. This is the kind of beauty I desire to define and defend.

Pursuing Beauty

I shall approach the debate through a Kantian paradigm. With exactness and novelty, I shall enter the ageless dialogue by way of a Kantian definition of beauty. I
will consider a beauty that is foundational Kantian (in its freedom and universality) and effectually Romantic (in its relation to human sociability and possibility). I will consider an interaction between beholder and beheld that is universally subjective, and a human response that is participatory and productive. In the language of Kant, I seek to merge Kant’s “beautiful” with his “good” as I propose that beauty (in the purposive sense) informs goodness (in the conceptual sense) in a

union that enables us to use the beautiful as an instrument for our aim regarding the good, so that the mental attunement that sustains itself and has subjective universal validity may serve as a basis for that other way of thinking that can be sustained only by laborious resolve but that is universally valid objectively.

(Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 78)

By the “laborious resolve . . . that is universally valid objectively” Kant refers to the good. Here Kant hints at the utility of beauty—perhaps the shared, mental influence rendered by the beautiful may, in a sense, predispose the mind to adopt what is good—yet he does not pursue this possibility, as Kant claims that beauty is “not practical in any way” (68). To my mind, Kant performs the laborious metaphysical work that actually establishes a common response and effect across humanity—subjective universal validity in the light of aesthetic presentation—and then appears to stop. What a tool, what an “instrument” does he seem to offer in the beautiful! Yet Kant does not push the beautiful beyond the minds he says it moves. Beauty for Kant does not touch the world external to the mind but remains confined to its inter-subjective influence on humanity.
Others disagree. In theories that similarly converge on the essentialness of beauty, writers like Percy Bysshe Shelley, Elaine Scarry, Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich Schiller, and Ralph Waldo Emerson assert that beauty dynamically refreshes, enlarges, and improves our minds. With such conceptual resources, I will examine how a Kantian beauty, in fact, revamps each mind inwardly and repositions each person externally in a process that enlivens and sustains all things. As beauty inspires an inward stripping and renewal of self, I will argue that beauty also urges that same self to participate in the regeneration and re-creation of the universe. The transformative ripple initiated by beauty moves from the one to the many by way of the transformed person, who changes the contours of the world. Beauty universally prompts us to live purposeful lives that include and transcend ourselves, and all of us can choose to live by beauty's overflow.

Let us begin our meditation on this Beauty, universal and dynamic, about which John Keats declares the following: "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty — that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'" (Keats 344).
Chapter One

Categories of Judgment

Beautiful is what, without a concept, is liked universally.

—Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment 64

Let us begin our exploration of Kantian beauty and its implications with a detailed look at the philosophy that grounds "the beautiful." What is Kantian beauty and how does it operate? In order to justify our extended use of Kantian beauty, we would do well first to express Kantian beauty as Kant defines and intends it for use. Let us situate ourselves within and elaborate upon Kant on his own terms before we extend his concept of beauty for our own purposes.

In his Critique of Judgment, the final work in Kant's three-part attempt to validate metaphysics as a science by an exhaustive analysis of human cognitive faculties, Kant distinguishes three possible categories of aesthetic judgment, or, judgments that "use imagination (perhaps in connection with understanding) to refer the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (45). These pleasures or displeasures that substantiate judgments of taste arise from either "the agreeable," "the good," or "the beautiful," which thereby "designate three different relations that presentations have to ... the[se] feeling[s] by reference to which we distinguish between objects or between ways of presenting them" (52). The agreeable is perhaps the least
consequential category of taste for our discussion; however, let us distinguish it from all other forms of liking so as to allow the beautiful unimpeded ascent in this project.

The agreeable is what directly gratifies us; it is agreeable to our senses as individuals. When I say that I like an object in this sense of liking, I mean that the object produces in me a subjective sensation, or, feeling, that is agreeable (48). When I say that I like coffee in terms of its agreeability to me, I mean not that I like its rich color or flavor—which rather would be an objective presentation or analysis of coffee—but that I like the subjective feeling, as driven by imagination and not cognition, that coffee produces in me, the subject. Kant would say that this subject-based feeling in the agreeable (as, we will later see, it is in the beautiful) is then redirected back toward the object, namely the coffee, which becomes an “object of our liking” (48). In other words, agreeability arouses desire for the object that gratifies us. Kant terms this process of desire an “inclination” toward the object that is inextricably connected to the object by interest. I have a special stake in coffee, because the object elicits agreeable feelings in me. I subsequently return to coffee and, by association, things of its kind in order to pursue further personal gratification and enjoyment. The interest inherent in a liking for the agreeable renders this category of taste subjectively individual rather than subjectively universal. When I claim in this way that I like coffee, I am not making the appeal that everyone must have the same response to, interaction with, and enjoyment of coffee that I do—in short, that everyone must like coffee. By stating this liking, I simply mean that the feelings that coffee elicits in me and the interest that it requires of me are agreeable to me. There exists no universal applicability or extension in the
agreeable; it involves tastes of sense based on sensation within empirical evidence, which can perhaps be a liking enjoyed generally—but by no means universally.

Unlike the agreeable, the good does contain a sense of universality, which comes from the following: What is good we like because the object or action is *intrinsically good*; we like the object or action for its own sake; we like the object or action for its value, for the purpose it contains and brings to the world (48). Kant says that the good “always contains the concept of a purpose, consequently a relation of reason to a volition... and hence a liking for the existence of an object or action” (48-49). If we want to claim that an object or action contains intrinsic goodness, we must know its intent or *purpose* for existence; we must “always know what sort of thing the object is [meant] to be” (49). If I like a political painting and want to claim that it is good, I must know the purpose for which the painting can be deemed good. Perhaps the painting champions justice for a certain population or urges redemptive action in a certain place. Only in knowing for what purpose the painting exists and in knowing what it seeks to achieve can I logically lay claim to the painting’s goodness, or, its ability to fulfill its intention. Regardless of the specific purpose posited by the so-called good object (or action or cause), it is clear that the good presupposes *interest*. The good is interested in the object, just as the agreeable is interested in the object that elicits enjoyment. Both the

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1 When square brackets appear in quotations from Kant’s works, the brackets are the translators’ insertions. My own interpolations to the Kantian texts will appear in the following bracket form: {hereafter cited in the text.}
good and the agreeable contain some interest or another; they are both partial judgments and unfree likings.²

Yet the good differs from the agreeable in that the good gains universal validity across humanity, because it rests on reason. What is good can be claimed good for all people and, most importantly, can be claimed so validly. Whereas with the agreeable we state our personal preference when say that we like the object of our inclination—but do not require everyone else to like it with us—, with the good we are not only permitted to say that we like the object of the good but, furthermore, that everyone should like object along with us. It is a matter of logic.

The good relies on a determinate concept and, as such, is an object of the will, which is a power of desire determined by reason—reason, being a faculty that works with nothing but the knowledge that arises logically from concepts (Kant, Judgment 93, 51; Kant, Pure Reason 45-46). Again, if I like the political painting because it is good, this means that I like the painting itself because of the claims it expresses or the causes it represents. I know what the painting is attempting to do, and I call it good for those attempts. Valid goodness is universal, because subjects can follow and assent to the logical line of argumentation that produces that liking called good. As in the case of the political painting and its intents, if I want to call the painting good, I must deductively

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² Partial judgments and unfree likings stand in contrast to the pure, free liking found in the beautiful. The agreeable and the good are both tainted and unfree, because these modes of judgment contain interest. We shall see later how Kant describes and establishes the free liking of the beautiful and how it is this characteristic that distinguishes beauty. Indeed, this reality that Kant identifies in the category of the beautiful is not only essential to the beautiful as it functions in this project but, even more, is precisely why the beautiful is chosen for this project.
establish its goodness. Thus, the good is said to have both aesthetic universality—as it captures our liking for the object itself—and logical universality—in that our liking for the object is based on a determinable chain of concepts (Kant, *Judgment* 56). The strength of the good comes from its capacity to compel rationally and logically universal assent and liking, a pronouncement that can be required, a “way of thinking that can be sustained only by laborious resolve but that is universally valid” (78). In short, Kant defines the good as “what we esteem, or endorse, i.e., that to which we attribute an objective value” (52).

Kant combines this element of universality of the good with the subjectivity of the agreeable as he defines the final category of judgment: the beautiful.

**Purposiveness Without Purpose**

*Your own feeling will provide me with the material on which to build, your own free powers of thought dictate the laws according to which we are to proceed.*

—Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*

To understand more fully how the beautiful operates in Kant’s third *Critique*—*Judgment*—it would be wise to review the cognitive foundation already laid by Kant in his first, *Critique of Pure Reason*. In *Pure Reason*, Kant outlines the differently functioning faculties within the mind. Our powers of cognition, those that allow us to perceive and consider our relation to the universe in which we live, among others, are legislated by
the faculties of understanding (from Pure Reason) and reason (the focus of Kant’s second work in the series, the Critique of Practical Reason). Both knowledge and desire govern different domains of a priori (necessary or self-evident)\(^3\) concepts and function independently of one another; that is, they work within unique and separate spheres of cognition—a divide that Kant says intrinsically cannot be bridged by the two faculties in themselves. In order for understanding and reason to interact in such a way that allows for full cognition and the full use of our minds, Kant says that something else—another power—must act as a bridge (Judgment 18). Kant calls this mediator the power of judgment (13): “Judgment will bring about a transition from the pure cognitive power, i.e., from the domain of the concepts of nature [in our understanding], to the domain of the concept of freedom [in reason], just as in its logical use it makes possible the transition from understanding to reason” (18). Judgment is the “ability to think the particular [concept] as contained under the universal . . . (the rule, principle, law),” and it serves to connect certain faculties within our minds so as to allow for the synthesis of cognition (18). In Kant, A Very Short Introduction, Roger Scruton explains that the faculty of judgment “enables us to see the empirical world as conforming to the ends of practical reason, and practical reason as adapted to our knowledge of the empirical

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\(^3\) Distinct from a posteriori knowledge (that is, empirical knowledge or knowledge gained from experience), a priori truths and the knowledge that arises from them are non-empirical truths that are necessarily so. They are strictly universal in a manner such that no exception is possible. In the Prolegomena, Kant defines a priori cognitions as “coming from pure understanding and pure reason” (9). “Pure,” because the statements are strictly non-empirical. A Kantian example of an a priori assertion is as follows: “All bodies are extended” (10).
world” (99). In other words, as judgment links knowledge and desire, this faculty makes us desire that which we know is good.

A certain mode of judgment—what Kant calls reflective judgment—will be a necessary term as we progress toward the nature of the beautiful. Reflective judgment uses the particular in nature in order to move to the universal and, subsequently, “requires a certain principle, which it cannot borrow from experience, precisely because it is to be the basis for the unity of all empirical principles under higher though still empirical principles, and hence is to be the basis that makes it possible to subordinate empirical principles to one another in a systematic way” (Judgment 19). In other words, this principle seeks to make systematized sense of universal, empirical, natural laws; to lay a preliminary framework by which to suppose certain universals from particulars; and to “assist our cognitive powers by making possible a system of experience in terms of particular natural laws.” However, because the basis of the principle is in reflective judgment and not in cognition mediated by our understanding, the principle is not a law to nature or natural laws but “only to itself.” Kant calls this principle the purposiveness of nature, a special a priori concept rooted in reflective judgment (20).

This a priori concept of purposiveness makes possible the empirical presentation of objects to us in the external world. Purposiveness is the precondition for the possibility of an object. Without purposiveness, objects could not only not exist in actuality, but even more preliminary, objects could not even be thought of as possibilities for any external representation. The purposiveness of an object comprises the form of
the object in intuition,⁴ both of which—namely, intuition and purposiveness—become the framework in which the object could rest or might exist in actuality. Thus, purposiveness is the real basis for the possibility of any empirical presentation of an object. In conjunction, purpose enables the object to become both cognized and actualized in external reality. When we have purposiveness with purpose, we have not just the theoretical framework of the object (that makes the object possible) but also its existence as a cognition and in actuality. When Kant writes that a “purpose is the object of a concept,” he means that “concept” to be the a priori concept of purposiveness and, thereby, means that purpose—and the expressed object itself—results from purposiveness (64). Kant continues: “we regard this [purposive] concept as the object’s cause (the real basis of its possibility) [. . . we regard purposiveness as] the causality that a concept has with regard to its object” (65). In what might be thought of as a causal chain, purposiveness causes purpose which causes the object, given and presented to the subject in reality. A purposive form on which to have purpose and expression is, of course, a necessary prerequisite; purposiveness precedes not just purpose but even

⁴ Kant defines intuition as “that through which [a mode of knowledge] is in immediate relation to [objects]” — the direct contents of our awareness — which understanding then uses to complete cognition (Pure Reason 65). “[I]ntuition takes place only in so far as the object is given to us,” and given to us by sensibility, a cognitive faculty even more basic in our minds than understanding or reason. The relationship between these faculties and modes of operations Kant describes as follows: “Objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts” (65). In this mental interplay, sensibility acts as the overarching precondition for a priori intuitions, the representations, that come from the faculty of sensibility, which themselves act as preconditions for the faculty of understanding. Understanding uses the given intuitions and generates concepts that remain a priori if the concepts are intuited from pure sensibility and, consequently, pure intuition (66). Thus is the synthesizing nature of sensibility and understanding in the process of cognition, as well as the mediating role of intuition.
possibility itself. What precisely is purpose? Here, purpose means “not merely . . . our
cognition of the object, but [also] . . . the object itself (its form or existence), as an effect
that is possible only through a concept of that effect” (65). As we revisit our causal
mode of explanation, consider purpose as the effect of the a priori concept,
purposiveness, and consider the presentation of the object as inextricably folded into
purpose. The relationship between purpose and the presentation of the object in
actuality is slightly different than the causally prior relationship between purposiveness
and purpose. The presentation of the object in actuality is less like the effect of purpose
but more so almost purpose itself.

It will do, though, to think of the relationship strictly causally—

\[ a \text{ priori concept of purposiveness} \rightarrow \text{ purpose} \rightarrow \text{ existence of object} \]

—because the most important relationship for us is that between purposiveness and
purpose.

We will exhaust the details of the preliminary framework that is purposiveness
soon enough. At the very least, though, it is clear that purpose cannot exist without
purposiveness. Indeed, purpose depends on purposiveness. Kant, in contrast, asserts
that the latter can exist independently: purposiveness can exist without purpose—“we
do call objects, states of mind, or acts purposive even if their possibility does not
necessarily presuppose the presentation of a purpose” (64). By this, Kant means that
purposiveness without purpose is permissible not just in the possibility of objects but in
the actuality of objects, too—in real existence! Kant writes:
Hence there can be purposiveness without a purpose, insofar as we do not posit the causes of the form . . . Now what we observe we do not always need to have insight into by reason (as to how it is possible). Hence we can at least observe a purposiveness as to form and take note of it in objects—even if only by reflection—without basing it on a purpose . . .” (65)

Purposiveness does not causally necessitate purpose. When we consider purposiveness alone, that is, purposiveness without purpose, we reflect on nothing but the precondition that is the form of the object in external reality. We consider nothing but the manifold of the particulars in this reflective principle of judgment—namely, the *a priori* concept of purposiveness. We consider the collected formal manifold prior to the cognitive synthesis that occurs in the presentation of the object of purpose. Therefore, by separating the process of cognition by faculty and function, Kant makes distinct the progress of cognition—which is absolutely essential for his later claims about what happens in cognition to make the beautiful as such.

When we do add purpose and, subsequently, this cognition and presentation, we have a case of purposiveness with purpose: We have not only assumed empirical unity of experience—a viable manifold upon which to cognize and actualize objects—based on reflective judgment, but we have also *gained* empirical unity of experience based on actual concepts—purpose, of course—from our understanding. In other words, we have both *reflected* (purposiveness) and *cognized* (purpose) a universal based on a particular empirical object or experience. We have joined the possibility of an object, in reflection, with the cognition that brings an object of purpose into our (external) reality.
Reflection is a process that is subject-based and subjective, while cognition is object-based and objective. In logical cognition the understanding refers the presentation to the object, while in aesthetic reflection the imagination refers the presentation to the subject (44). As we have seen, Kant separates these faculties into their unique functionings when he states that an object or an interaction with an object can be purposive without purpose. When an object is purposive without purpose, our reflection of the object contains no thought of concept, cause, or purpose (65). We merely consider the form—the subjective presentation—of the object, which enables an interaction that has no logical basis in the object itself but rather an aesthetic character that resonates in the subject—the perceiver—alone (28).

Consider a dump truck that transports and delivers not goods, but messages. Analogous to purposiveness with purpose, the purpose of the dump truck is to dump the messages and then depart, just as a purposive object provides the very framework upon which to unload purpose. Put simply, the dump truck is the purposive vehicle through which to deliver messages of purpose. If we then choose to consider the dump truck itself and separate it from any contents or messages, we similarly consider purposiveness itself; alone do we consider this vehicle used for the presentation of purpose, this vehicle upon which concepts begin. Purposiveness then becomes the very

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5 A presentation can be aesthetic, a term that most nearly means that the experience of the presented object is subject-based, or, contained within the mind of the subject alone. For Kant an aesthetic presentation yields “a judgment whose determining basis cannot be other than subjective” (44). The “aesthetic character” of a subjective presentation is “what constitutes its reference to the subject and not to the object” (28).
6 I am indebted to Marjorie Levinson for this analogy. See Works Consulted for full bibliography.
condition for cognition and experience. We impose purposiveness on the world with which we interact so as to lay the necessary preconditions for those interactions. If not for purposiveness we could neither cognize nor experience; it follows that there can be no purpose without preliminary purposiveness. When Kant considers reflection apart from our understanding, he means to consider purposiveness—the dump truck—itself.

Are we nearly to Kantian beauty, and if so, how is it related to a dump truck? In general cognition, we use the faculties of imagination “to combine the manifold of intuition” and understanding “to provide the unity of the concept uniting the [component] presentations” (Kant, Judgment 62). In everyday cognition, we are presented with a purposive object with purpose, and we think about the object. For example, if I see the book sitting on my table and think, “book,” then (in usual cognition) I immediately consider the denotations and connotations and associations that are wrapped into my conception—the concept—of book. Even more preliminary, in order to see the book and even to know that it is indeed a book—in other words, to cognize the book as a book itself—I must move beyond the mere presentation of the form of the book. I consider more than simply how the book affects me in terms of pleasure or displeasure, which is the mere effect of its purposiveness. With the interplay and synthesis of my mental faculties, I rather view the book as a full cognition.

When a presentation is given to us without purpose, however—that is, before our understanding synthesizes the presentation with its concept and, subsequently, the experience becomes a full cognition—we experience but a general feeling of pleasure or displeasure. This feeling has nothing to do with cognition, “for through this pleasure or
displeasure [we] do not cognize anything in the object of the presentation” (29). This feeling precedes full cognition. The object is purposive and the presentation is without purpose; the presentation is nothing but an “aesthetic presentation of purposiveness,” and the experience is subjective for the subject (29). If we again consider the book that rests on my table, allow me to explain how a singularly purposive experience with the book might unfold: I see the object on the table. It is presented to me; the object is given to me as a manifold within intuition, and I pause there. I do not consider the book for its book-ness or for what gives it the name, book, or for makes it a book, I do not view it as a potential container of knowledge or thought, or even as an object that signifies and evokes a thousand different memories in me, but rather I consider the experience of the book, the experience of the presentation of the book. More precisely, I consider the presentation of the concept-less, name-less object of intuition that it is. How the presentation of this object affects me with either pleasure or displeasure is the object’s purposive effect on me. In the case of the book, it is the purposive form of the book that might elicit this purposive feeling in me.

Only when we extract Kantian purposiveness from all other cognitive powers and principles and, subsequently, come to understand how it functions as a unique component of our minds can we begin to explicate Kantian beauty. Indeed, we have done the hard work of the former.
What is Beauty?

Now what we observe we do not always need to have insight into by reason (as to how it is possible).

— Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* 65

As we have followed Kant in his foundationalist progression toward aesthetic judgment, taste, and the beautiful, let us now observe Kant’s definition of beauty:

[If] a given presentation unintentionally brings the imagination . . . into harmony with the understanding . . . and this harmony arouses a feeling of pleasure, then the object must be regarded as purposive for the reflective power of judgment . . .

When the form of an object . . . is judged in mere reflection on it . . . to be the basis of a pleasure in such an object’s presentation, then the presentation of this object is also judged to be connected necessarily with this pleasure, and hence connected with it not merely for the subject apprehending this form but in general for everyone who judges [it]. The object is then called beautiful, and our

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7 Scruton explains the imagination as follows: In *Pure Reason*, “Kant had argued for the central role of the imagination in the ‘synthesis’ of concept and intuition. Imagination transforms intuition into datum; we exercise the imagination whenever we attribute to our experience a ‘content’ that represents the world. When I see the man outside my window, the concept ‘man’ is present in my perception. This work of impregnating experience with concepts is the work of the imagination” (105).
ability to judge by such a pleasure (and hence with universal validity) is called
taste. (30)⁸

The above includes terms we have both seen and defined: understanding, reflection,
judgment, purposiveness, form, presentation, object, subject, and pleasure. It is their
respective interplay, as described above by Kant, that brings about beauty. Sometimes,
when we judge an object reflectively, harmony arises between our imagination and
understanding. The empirical presentation of the purposive object brings our cognitive
faculties into harmonious attunement with one another, and we feel pleasure. The
experience contains neither concepts nor interest but rather the heightened awareness
of our mental powers at work. In the same way that we do not skip to the message the
dump truck delivers in purposiveness without purpose, in aesthetic judgment, our
minds do not hasten to the cognition they are able to produce – because there is no
message, no concept, and no cognition necessary within this subjectively aesthetic
presentation. The experience is purposive, and so we examine the expert functioning of
the dump truck itself. We revel in the process our minds can undergo. In this internal
attunement, we are aware of what our minds are capable, and we feel pleasure. “The
very consciousness of a merely formal purposiveness in the play of the subject’s
cognitive powers, accompanying a presentation by which an object is given, is that
pleasure” (68). We like the feeling, and we deem the source—the object that has
produced this liking—beautiful.

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⁸ I address at length the issue of universal validity within the beautiful—a concept
crucial to my project—in just a few pages.
This mental harmony that elicits the feeling of the beautiful cannot be a
cognition, because beauty depends entirely on the feeling of this pleasure within the
subject. This experience of the beautiful cannot in any way be thought of as a result of
cognition, for Kant declares that the “subjective [feature] of a presentation which cannot at
all become an element of cognition is the pleasure or displeasure connected with that
presentation” (29). As beauty is nothing but the effect of a certain pleasure, which itself
is the effect of the attunement of certain mental faculties, it follows that the experience
of the beautiful is very much outside of any cognition.

Not only is beauty outside of cognition, but we now know that it also precedes
cognition. As Kant continues to frame beauty negatively, that is, in a denial of all that
beauty cannot be, he writes: “Therefore, the subjective [feature] of the presentation
which cannot at all become an element of cognition is the purposiveness that precedes
the cognition of an object . . . Therefore, in this case we call the object purposive only
because its presentation itself is an aesthetic presentation of purposiveness” (29). We
have shown that purposiveness precedes both purpose and cognition; thus, if the
feeling of the beautiful arises from a presentation that is purposive, it is clear that
beauty must also precede cognition. Therefore, neither in its basis in pleasure nor in
purposiveness can beauty in any way be said to be of cognition. Indeed, “the pleasure
[of the beautiful] cannot express anything other than the object’s being commensurate
with the cognitive powers that are, and insofar as they are, brought into play when we
judge reflectively, and hence [expresses] merely a subjective formal purposiveness of
the object” (29-30). Beauty results from the harmonious attunement of mental faculties
that do, in most cases, produce cognitions. Their role in beauty, however, is curiously disparate from their everyday operations and surprisingly unique in effect.

Kant calls this state of facultative mental harmony the "free play of the cognitive powers" and the liking "disinterested beauty" (62-63). Of the three categories of judgment—the agreeable, the good, and the beautiful—only the beautiful is free and without interest: If we recall that interest redirects the subject to whom the presentation is given toward the presented object itself, we soon discover that a liking of the beautiful could never contain interest. Beauty is inherently subjective and subject-based, so it must not contain interest. There are no concepts or purposes involved in the experience of the beautiful, and the liking is not tainted by interest, "for the basis of the pleasure is posited merely in the form of the object for reflection in general, and hence not in a sensation of the object, nor with a reference to any concept that might involve some intention or other" (30). Kant further states that "only the liking involved in taste for the beautiful is disinterested and, thus, free, since we are not compelled to give our approval by any interest, whether of sense or of reason" (52). It is clear that there can be no logical appeal involved in a liking of the beautiful—as there is in the liking for the good—, for logic is rooted in cognition, and we have seen that cognition is not involved in beauty. In the same way, it is clear that no liking according to sensation—as it exists in the liking for the agreeable—could be free, because inherent within sensation is the desire of the object itself. The subject is gratified by the object and is interested in acquiring the object in the future. On the contrary, nothing of sense nor of reason could convince or require us to like an object that has elicited our experience of the beautiful.
This effect that we rightly call *beauty* is contained in the mental powers of the subject alone. If I am rightfully to call a deciduous tree on a colorful, autumn day *beautiful*, I do not speak to any beauty in the tree itself. The tree as the object of apprehension does not contain intrinsic beauty in the Kantian sense, because Kantian beauty is not intrinsic to any object. This beauty has little to with the object at all and, instead, has everything to do with the *presentation* of the object. In terms of our example, the tree is beautiful in that it effects a quickening harmony within my mental powers and evokes a pleasure within myself. No characteristics of the tree are relevant or present except its purposive ability to align the subject as such. “[A]part from a reference to the subject’s feeling, beauty is nothing by itself” (63). Beauty is not a characteristic of the object nor is it contained within the object. Kant concludes: “A *pure judgment of taste* is one that is not influenced by charm or emotion . . . whose determining basis is therefore merely the purposiveness of the form” (69). The purposive presentation of the object is essential to its beauty; indeed, it is its form alone that enables the subject to know beauty.

The universality of the beautiful arises from its dependence on the subject. Only because the beautiful is an aesthetic judgment, a subjective, pure liking devoid of all interest, concept, and purpose as related to the object, may the beautiful claim universal validity. We have said that a rightful claim of beauty does not depend on the object, the beheld, itself but rather on the subject, the beholder, alone. In the experience of the

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9 It follows that we cannot know that objects will elicit the experience of the beautiful until we personally interact with the object; the presence or absence of this liking is entirely empirical—“we must try it out,” says Kant (31).
beautiful the cognitive faculties of the beholder attune internally, thereby eliciting pleasure. Beauty depends on the alignment of these intrinsic faculties, the imagination and the understanding, and becomes universal in that everyone has these same faculties. Everyone has the same “subjective conditions for judging objects”; everyone employs his or her own endowed mental powers to judge and cognize and think; in response to the beautiful, therefore, everyone “who is so constituted” will harmonize accordingly (62, 64). If I look at a flower and experience the pure liking of the beautiful, it follows that every other person who views the flower will experience that same beauty, because each person has the same mental machinery and requires the same purposive preconditions for cognition. The universality of the beautiful holds, “in other words, for all human beings . . . because we have a basis . . . that is common to all” (64, 86). Kantian beauty is universal, because the faculties of all human minds are identical.

We experience this phenomenon called beauty: We visit an art gallery and view a beautiful sculpture. We scale a mountain and gaze upon the landscape below. We view that same flower and encounter what we know as beauty beyond all doubt. And within our beings we wish to make a claim that extends beyond us: we want to say that we have experienced a beauty that everyone else—when presented with the same interaction—should experience, too. Whereas in a judgment of the agreeable we simply say, “I like this flower,” and modestly imply that it is agreeable to us—that it gratifies our personal sensations and, perhaps, we might do well to set out a few more flower vases around our apartments—in a judgment of the beautiful we do not stop at personal sentiments. When we are confronted with a pure liking of beauty and we
declare, "I like this flower; it is beautiful," we mean that it is beautiful universally. We desire that "everyone ought to give his approval to the object at hand and that he too should declare it beautiful" (86). When we make a judgment of beauty, we require all people to agree with us; we ask that they, too, find beauty in the aesthetic encounter. When we make this appeal, we do not say how everyone will respond — because beautiful presentations and interactions can be tainted with interest and the like— rather, we say how everyone ought to respond:10 "[A declaration of beauty] does not say that everyone will agree with my judgment, but that he ought to" (89). We in fact appeal to the aesthetic taste of everyone. And we rightly can, because, on Kant's account, we are subject to and employ the same cognitive machinery to which every human being is subject. It becomes a subjective necessity without logical objectivity.11

10 Kant thereby explains the varying claims made concerning what is beautiful. Kant grants that a multiplicity of aesthetic claims exist in the world:

experience teaches us that the taste of reflection, with its claims that its judgment (about the beautiful) is universally valid for everyone, is also rejected often enough . . . What the people who make these judgments dispute about is not whether such a claim is possible; they are merely unable to agree, in particular cases, on the correct way to apply this ability." (58)

In the empirical world, humans imperfectly apply this "free beauty" that does, indeed, "demand universal assent" (76, 89). Perhaps a particular liking of the beautiful, in some way, contains a concept and, thus, is not a pure aesthetic judgment (based on feeling alone). In such a case, an appeal to universal liking — that is, to universal subjectivity — would not be valid. In this way Kant accounts for the empirical discrepancies of his cognitive analysis in terms of aesthetics.

11 The subjective universality of the beautiful differs from the logical universality found in a judgment of the good precisely because the former is subject-dependent while the latter is object-dependent. We like the good because the object contains some purpose or interest — in other words, some logical appeal — to which we must assent. It is the good object itself to which we "attribute an objective value," and that liking for the good is established with cognition and logic and, thereby, becomes universal (52). In contrast, we like the beautiful because our minds as subjects are affected in a certain way, and as all minds are similarly constructed, the aesthetic presentation of the
It is just in its subjective universality that we begin to see not only the functioning of Kantian beauty but also its possible functionality. We glimpse beauty's implications and value. Consider what we have gained with this category of judgment: in Kantian beauty, we have a necessary commonality, a shared feature across humanity that is not "pathological" (as in the case of the agreeable) or "intellectual" (as in the good) but rather aesthetic (68). In On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense, Friedrich Nietzsche even declares that the aesthetic relation that exists between us and the world, between human and other, is in fact the only "correct perception" through which to consider that which is not us (880). For Nietzsche, the aesthetic becomes the "middle sphere" and "mediating force" on which our interactions themselves depend (880). In On the Aesthetic Education of Man, Friedrich Von Schiller asserts that human freedom comes from beauty and art alone: "if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom (571, 574). The beauty that is simultaneously shared and experienced by mankind, in fact, actualizes and saves mankind.

With the universality of Kantian beauty we have a means, a priori and inherently justified, by which to unite all people. We need not and cannot argue for the existence of the beautiful or, for that matter, even seek to establish it. According to Kant, beauty is something that happens unprompted and freely to the beholder, and not just to a beautiful can be said to be universal. Kant explains that the "universal subjective validity of this liking, the liking we connect with the presentation of the object we call beautiful, is based solely on the mentioned universality of the subjective conditions for judging objects" (62).
particular beholder but to all human beholders. We are seized by beauty, and we are seized by beauty together. Beauty identically captivates everyone in the world, and everyone in the world rests in the pleasure from the beautiful. We cannot earn the experience or presence of the beautiful but are unexpectedly presented with it in moments we wish would continue. Kept in the "state of [having] the presentation [of the beautiful] itself . . . [with] our cognitive powers engaged [in their occupation] without any further aim[, w]e linger in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself" (Kant, Judgment 68). In On Beauty and Being Just, Elaine Scarry notes that "our desire for beauty is likely to outlast its object because, as Kant once observed, unlike all other pleasures, the pleasure we take in beauty is inexhaustible. No matter how long beautiful things endure, they cannot out-endure our longing for them" (50). In beauty we have a universal longing—for rest, for internal quickening, and for awareness of self and other—that eternally captivates all of us.

Yet Kant says the experience of the beautiful ends at the pleasure it brings the beholder: "This pleasure is also not practical in any way, neither like the one arising from the pathological basis, agreeableness, nor like the one arising from the intellectual basis, the conceived good" (Judgment 68). The agreeable can have applicability to the world outside the mind of the subject, because we can, for instance, live in such a way as to surround ourselves with those things that gratify us. I know that I enjoy airpopped popcorn, so it is likely that I will store not only an airpopping machine in my house but perhaps, also, other kinds and styles of popcorn. With regards to the agreeable, I can
actively acquire the things that I like, namely, popcorn. I can seek to satisfy my pathological pleasures through the way that I live. When Kant says that the pleasure from beauty is not practical, one reading might imply he means that, unlike agreeableness, beauty cannot be hypothesized or anticipated. Because beauty results from purposiveness of form and from nothing in the object itself, it seems we cannot actively position ourselves in the wake of beauty, for we do not know when or because of what our minds will attune in response to beauty. There can exist no external signal or indication of ensuing beauty for the beholder. I cannot anticipate the mountain that will elicit beauty in one moment and the small stone that brings about the same pleasure in the next. I am not able with any intention to position myself near beauty. Therefore, Kant holds that this liking, dissimilar to that of the agreeable, is entirely contained in the personal pleasure occasioned within the subject’s mind—this is without extension and applicability.

The beautiful cannot partake in the practicality of the “conceived good” either: the good gains logical force in the external world, but the beautiful cannot overstep the confines of the mind. If an object or cause is proven “good,” we are “compelled to give our approval” and inclined to alter our actions accordingly (52). If it is proven to me that to recycle cardboard cereal boxes is better than to dispose of them in the lawn of the city park—that one action is intrinsically good, is “esteemed” or “favored,” over another (52)—than I am compelled to effect a change in my conduct and interaction within the world. I should recycle; it becomes a choice I have to make, and one that necessary influences things outside of me. Kant insists that beauty cannot transform
anything but the mind: the instant we begin to like something based on its utility, category, or existence, we enter into a liking based on concept, purpose, and interest, which taints our liking (52). The liking becomes unfree and thereby is not a pure liking arising from the beautiful. Kant seems to think that as soon as the beautiful becomes practical, the altered liking necessarily contains some concept and is no longer a liking of beauty.

Kant summarizes the effects of the amalgamation of the other two likings with the liking with beauty: “Now just as a connections of beauty, which properly concerns only form, with the agreeable (the sensation) prevented the judgment of taste from being pure, so does a connection of beauty with the good (i.e., as to how, in terms of the thing’s purpose, the manifold is good for the thing itself) impair the purity of a judgment of taste” (77). Kant maintains that beauty has no pratical value but is merely the pleasure of reflection and contemplation from form in which we desire to linger and reproduce. Though the purposive object of beauty “repeatedly arouses our attention, . . . the mind here is passive” (68). Kant limits the influence of the beautiful to the singular subject alone; he says that beauty is not practical and cannot affect the external world.

I maintain that Kant underestimates the power of such minds that are enlarged by beauty. I aim to build upon this aesthetic foundation laid by Kant so as to further the scope and influence of Kantian beauty.

**Beauty Prophesies**

Let us gauge what is at stake with Kantian beauty: we have an aesthetic response that is inter-subjectively universal and is something that captivates *without rationality or*
logic all people. When presented with the beautiful, all people will be similarly affected. What do we make of this influence that is universal? What might this influence contain or imply? When our minds attune as a result of beauty, we feel a pleasure unlike any other. We wonder at the nature of this pleasure. As we have explicated the liking of the beautiful, we have seen that the liking consists of the internal harmony of our mental faculties as a result of certain presentations from the external world. Though we do not conceptualize anything—because there are no concepts involved—we feel the world adapting to our faculties; we feel a curious alignment between our internal constitution and the world. We feel that we were made for the world in which we live, and that the world was made for us. We feel pleasure when we feel our minds fuse in expert functioning and capability; with our cognitive machinery, we cannot but exist—and thrive—in this world. This uncanny mirroring of the world to the purposive framework upon which our minds cognize prepares us for the unending mutualism between ourselves and the universe. I will argue that this exchange is generative and, thus, gains practicality. We are struck by beauty; we are changed by beauty; we act in light of the beauty experienced and anticipate the beauty to come.
Chapter Two

Once in the Mind

Making beautiful things a part of my life is neither loose talk nor a metaphor: I must literally come into direct contact with them and spend part of my life in their presence and company. What that can do for me, or anyone else, remains to be seen. It’s time to ask that question.

– Alexander Nehamas, Only a Promise of Happiness 101

Kant hints at the possible force of beauty when he speaks of the rules that join the beautiful with the good, that is, that “unit[e] taste with reason” in “a union that enables us to use the beautiful as an instrument for our aim regarding the good, so that the mental attunement that sustains itself and has subjective universal validity may serve as a basis for that other way of thinking that can be sustained only by laborious resolve but that is universally valid objectively” (Judgment 78). We continue our pursuit of a dynamic and practical beauty by extending the application of Kantian beauty in this way: In the language of Kant, I seek to consider how the beautiful might be used as an instrument regarding the external or social good by exploring the transformation of the individual touched by beauty.

Central to this argumentative movement, however, is Kantian universal subjectivity. If we choose to accept the Kantian explication of beauty—which lies not in
any object or image but, instead, emerges from the interaction between the purposive object and the human mind—we need not focus on which objects facilitate the feeling of beauty in our minds. In this project, I do not attempt to organize external objects into categories of those objects that do seem to initiate beauty in us and those that do not. I do not seek to support such claims as, “This style of sculpture is, more often than not, preferred over this genre of painting,” or, “This rockface in nature seems to elicit the feeling of beauty in individuals more frequently than its artificial counterpart in the gallery.” I choose a Kantian beauty as a foundation so that these discussions of “beautiful” objects remain secondary (and largely irrelevant), because, for Kant, beauty is not a property of any object but rather the product of the curious union between object and mind. This product—namely, beauty—becomes subjectively universal in that all minds contain the same machinery and are, thus, provoked to the same internal response. Beauty does not result from any internal content of the object but exclusively from this fusion. Kantian beauty would seem to imply so much precisely because it initiates a discussion that precludes the inexhaustible dialogue of beauty with regards to specific objects. We can have no knowledge or hint of which purposive, purposeless forms will facilitate beauty, because the pleasurable product that is beauty precedes all cognition and thought. Kant holds that we are powerless to move into an encounter with beauty or to bring objects that elicit beauty into our presence. Without argumentation or agency, the exchange simply happens spontaneously, and our shared faculties cannot but respond similarly and accordingly. Each individual responds with personal delight at the mental attunement that occurs within his or her mind, and
Kantian universal subjectivity maintains that all people are wired to respond in the same way.

My interest in Kantian beauty is not in the fact that a certain rock face always evokes a feeling of beauty in those who perceive it, or, more generally, in the objects that allow for beauty. I am not interested in the style and manner of purposive objects. I instead aim to draw out the possible implications and utility of a Kantian beauty that happens expressly because of shared mental features across humanity. What might beauty do for the human mind and, subsequently, for human minds collectively, once it has already happened? I begin from a position that grants Kantian beauty and, in doing so, grants Kantian universal subjectivity as being inextricably woven into the definition and existence of this beauty. It is the concept of universal subjectivity that I wish to carry into the next sections; indeed, this thesis hinges on this foundation laid by Kant, for it is the force of the universal subjective that allows, I will argue, figures like Percy Bysshe Shelley and Ralph Waldo Emerson to make assertions about beauty and aesthetics that, consequently, affect all people.

Kant himself does not claim any larger influence or usefulness of the subjectively universal experience of the beautiful other than the inert pleasure it happens to evoke in the mind. He says that, while beauty is

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12 For Kant, the experience of beauty is a encounter in which our minds are struck by beauty, and we can do nothing but rest in passive entertainment of the chance interaction. We have seen in Judgment that Kant maintains that we can neither anticipate, nor prolong, nor knowingly create the beautiful. Since the experience of the beautiful has to do with the interaction between an object’s autotelically purposive form and the mind’s reception of it in an exchange that elicits the pleasure, “beauty,” we have no agency in bringing beauty into or upon ourselves. We are lucky to be struck by
not practical in any way . . . it does have some causality in it, namely, to keep [us in] the state of [having] the presentation itself, and [to keep] the cognitive powers engaged [in their occupation] without any further aim. We linger in the contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself. (*Judgment* 68)

Kant concludes the above thought as abruptly as my mind leaps to possibility. I find Kant’s evaluative remark incredibly limiting: “The mind here is passive” (68). Kant does not consider what effect or change beauty’s reinforcement and reproduction in the mind might occasion, but rather claims that the pleasure of beauty is self-contained and inert. All of us, together, feel a certain pleasure, and that is the end of it. Kant provides no discussion of how a mind might be altered (or alter another mind) following an encounter with beauty.

I begin with a Kantian beauty that is already in the mind. The purposive forms—whatever they happen to be—have already aligned the mind in a curious harmony between self and other, and beauty is happening. Percy Bysshe Shelley picks up where Kant leaves off, and reexamines the effect of beauty once in the mind of the individual.

**The Transformative Process**

We now turn to Shelley’s “A Defence of Poetry,” written in 1821, to investigate the essay’s Kantian overlap as well as its critiques and extensions. Through certain

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purposive objects that allow for the feeling of beauty—which lies in the fortunate exchange—for the encounters are empirical and random; we are acted upon, and our role is strictly passive, according to Kant.
Shelleyan concepts found in "Defence," I hope to progress argumentatively in the following way:

1. *Kantian beauty strikes all minds in such a way that produces unanimous pleasure for all people.*

2. *In a dynamic and life-sustaining way, Kantian beauty transforms, enlarges, and improves the mind of the individual whom it strikes.*

Why might beauty change the mind of the individual? The larger conceptual progression will proceed as follows: Like Kant, Shelley begins from the assertion of a certain universal subjectivity in response to the aesthetic; but Shelley goes beyond Kant when he identifies certain principles, contained within all minds, that are uniquely activated in the shared experience of beauty. Shelley posits that these innate principles alone allow for any sort of internal transformation within the individual and, later, any external exchange or sociability across humanity. As Shelley outlines the aesthetic specificity of our design, it becomes clear that our ability to be marked by beauty—and, further, to participate in the purposes beauty inspires—is the foundation that gives us the capacity to function within the universe. As declared by Alexander Nehamas in *Only the Promise of Happiness,* beauty exclusively “quicken[s] the sense of life, giving it shape and direction,” in the sense that *beauty alone has the ability to stir mankind’s universal foundations and, thus, the power to improve the individual entire* (77). Beauty impresses the self and allows the individual to know the competence of his or her own
mental faculties, and, broadly, it is the knowledge and improvement of that inherent competence through beauty that allows for individual transformation. In other words, we will have achieved a beauty that is not passive or inert but rather dynamic and effective, because it changes us.

Let us begin our conversation concerning the place and function of beauty in the individual first through the Kantian and Shelleyan overlap as to mankind’s cognitive structures—an overlap that permits our critical use of the concept of universal subjectivity and of its implications.

Although Shelley may not so meticulously delineate the cognitive structures and workings of the mind as Kant does, Shelley, I argue, follows a Kantian foundation when he speaks of faculties primary to cognition and logic that serve as the initial framework for all subsequent thought. Shelley calls this the “imaginative and creative faculty” to which “modern forms of manners and opinions” are subordinate and whose nature “differs from logic, [in] that it is not subject to the controul of the active powers of the mind, and that its birth and recurrence has no necessary connexion with consciousness or will” (507, 506). He insists that this “creative faculty” is the “basis of all knowledge,” and describes it as the “Power which is seated upon the throne of [the poet’s] own soul . . . that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man” (503, 508, 483). This power that Shelley asserts corresponds with the mental foundations outlined by Kant. All people have a common faculty that permits that which is external to impress and captivate them. Our shared structure, Shelley says, is “connate with the origin of man” and is subject to the same purposive presentations that affect Kantian
faculties—namely, those that elicit the experience of the beautiful. Just as certain faculties internally attune to one another in the experience of Kantian beauty, Shelley’s creative faculty is also affected by presentations, or, “impressions” (480). Because Shelley adopts this Kantian, universal mental foundation, he likewise gains Kantian universal subjectivity, the mental attunement that holds for all people. In “Defence,” Shelley cites Francis Bacon’s *New Organon*, in which “Lord Bacon” considers our natural affinity for interaction with and relation to the external world as “the same footsteps of nature impressed upon the various subjects of the world’—and . . . the faculty which perceives them as the storehouse of axioms common to all knowledge” (482). As each individual contains a “faculty of approximation to the beautiful,” that is, a creative faculty, all people experience this aesthetic relation in varying degrees; thus, everyone can apprehend the true and the beautiful (482). This common faculty is the medium through which beauty both comes into being and shapes the beings it touches. Shelley begins with Kantian shared structure in order to wield and apply the force that is Kantian universal subjectivity, which Kant himself did not apply.

Shelley grants a slightly nuanced Kantian definition of beauty when he critiques Kant’s insistence on the passivity of beauty once beauty has touched the mind.\(^{13}\)\(^{14}\) Shelley

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\(^{13}\) Shelley describes the aesthetic experience as an “intenser and purer pleasure” that approaches an asymptotic “highest delight,” the relation of which he calls the beautiful. For Shelley, beauty is nothing but the “good which exists in the relation” between this “highest pleasure”—this most pure feeling of delight—and its “cause”—that is, the object (482).

\(^{14}\) I begin with a Kantian and Shelleyan beauty that is presently happening in the mind; in order words, that the feeling from the relation that is beauty is occurring in the individual has been granted. I begin here, in the mind of the subject, so as to bypass any discussion of “beautiful” internal content in the objects that make beauty-producing
asks the following question: What might our "contemplation of the beautiful . . . [a] contemplation that reinforces and reproduces itself" imply for the individual in the throes of beauty? (68). Let us acknowledge that we cannot necessarily choose or control our experiences of Kantian beauty—moments that bring such delight—but, perhaps, Shelley intimates, the delight beauty offers us renders some change in us.\textsuperscript{15}

We now look to a metaphor that opens Shelley's "Defence" that we will use to suggest a cognitive interplay that generates not universal passive pleasure, but a universal pleasure that is personally transformative and, later, socially significant. Shelley begins with our shared features and shared responses so as to depart from the passivity at which Kant stops and, rather, argue for a dynamic and effective beauty. Shelley frames the next part of our exploration by comparing humanity to an "Aeolian lyre" as a means to relate the exchange between man's internal constitution and the input it naturally receives as a constituent of the world—in other words, Kantian attunement.\textsuperscript{16} Shelley draws a distinction between the lyre as capable of "melody" as

\textsuperscript{15} In terms of beautiful objects, Kant insists that we do not have the capacity to predict which purposive forms will be beautiful to us. If we attempt to categorize which objects have brought about beauty in the past, we introduce an element of interest, which renders the experience tainted and, in fact, a judgment based on agreeableness rather than pure, disinterested beauty. We cannot obtain or choose to position ourselves in the presence of an object that elicits the feeling of the beautiful, because we would need to cognize first in order to do that. As Kant has belabored, the feeling of beauty precedes all cognition. Again, Kant maintains that we cannot choose beauty, because beauty exists apart from cognition.

\textsuperscript{16} With his mention of an "Aeolian lyre," Shelley references Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, "The Eolian Harp," as well as the philosophy within Coleridge's lines: "And what if all of animated Nature / Be but organic harps, diversely framed, / That tremble
well as "harmony" that provides insight with regard to the unique personal
transformation rendered by beauty. Here also lies the point of departure of the
Shelleyan applications of beauty from those of Kant.

The Melody

There are two kinds of pleasure, one durable, universal, and permanent; the other transitory and
particular. Utility may either express the means of producing the former or the latter. In the
former sense, whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and
adds spirit to sense, is useful.

—Shelley, "Defense" 500

The manner in which Shelley posits and relates the "melody" of the lyre
elucidates his critique of Kantian beauty, as well as extends beauty for his own
purposes. Shelley likens mankind to an Aeolian lyre with regards to "melody" in the
following terms: "Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal
impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian
lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody" (Shelley 480). Shelley
constructs us as lyres in a world whose unique wind is constantly exerted upon and
within us. Our faculties are adept for the affection and exchange. Just as lyres engage in

into thought as o'er them sweeps, / Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze, / At once
the soul of each, and God of all?" (Coleridge 256).
a curious mutualism with the breezes that run through them, we too are shaped for
interaction with the world that surrounds us.

At first glance, this Shelleyan construction of humanity in terms of melody
appears similar to Kantian passivity in the experience of the beautiful. A melody is
literally denoted as “that aspect of musical composition which consists in the
arrangement of single notes in expressive succession . . . A series of single notes
arranged in a musically expressive or distinctive sequence” (“Melody”). Perhaps we
may think of the Kantian experience of the beautiful as a passive melody: a pleasure that
is simple and singular, self-contained and focused inwardly. The pleasure of beauty is
personally satisfying but effects no change, neither personally nor socially. Kantian
beauty produces in the subject nothing but the wish to continue in the presence of the
unanticipated object that has elicited the feeling of beauty. We have no governance over
this state of rapture, and our transient posture toward the aesthetic departs as silently as
it comes. Kantian beauty might best be thought of as a soundless lyre: its melody
produces neither a productive sound for itself nor a consequential sound for others; it
provides neither internal nor external effect. The passive melody enters the hearer then
leaves without consequence. The wind rushes through the lyre but leaves the instrument
unchanged. Though beauty touches all minds with a certain pleasure, this interaction
leaves no mark on the mind according to Kant.

The phrasing within Shelley’s description of the lyre, however, indicates
something more: he writes that “man is an instrument over which a series of external
and internal impressions are driven . . . which move it by their motion to ever-changing
melody" (Shelley 480, emphasis added). Crucial to the analogy between lyre and man is the lyre’s ability to be moved by the impressions that run through it. For Kant, man may be moved by beauty in some moment, but when the internal attunement ends, the man remains the same; the movement bears no lasting effect. For Shelley, on the other hand, the very predisposition to be moved and affected by impressions enables inward transformation. Shelley writes of the "pleasurable impressions which awak[en]" the subject, who has become the "reflected image of that impression; and as the lyre trembles and sounds after the wind has died away, so the child[—a second trope—]seeks, by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect, to prolong also a consciousness of the cause" (480-481). Not only are the lyre and the child moved by the impressions that excite them, but they also internally adjust so as to prolong the feeling and, perhaps, prepare for future interactions. Shelley posits a dynamic melody that, in the exchange, reshapes the person.

Dynamic Relation

[H]is auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.

—Shelley, “Defence” 486

Shelley’s poetical faculty that resides within all people becomes the soil upon which beauty cultivates personal change. In his essay, Shelley speaks of “Poetry” in the “universal sense,” which he describes as “all forms of order and of beauty” (Shelley
Poetry of this kind loosely corresponds to Kantian purposive objects, which, with subjectively universal appeal, affect all minds with pleasure and delight. Once this poetry has initiated this kind of aesthetic exchange in the minds of people, Shelley argues that all minds become similarly and permanently impressed. As all minds contain some measure of this “faculty of approximation to the beautiful” (and Shelley calls “those in whom it exists in excess” poets), I will argue that all minds undergo transformation according to relation and reproduction (482). Shelley recalls these stages of the interaction as they are wedded with the mind’s response: “to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word the good which exists in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression” (482). I will address first the relation between existence and perception: Whence does this relation arise, and why does Shelley call it “good”? Shelley describes the way in which poetry establishes and enhances relational mentation as a process endlessly expansive and revisionist: “[Poetry] awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought” (487). When we are flooded with the unfamiliarity of otherness, that which has become stagnant is revived as our minds absorb, rearticulate, and reform the relations to which they have been recently exposed. In the exchange with the beautiful, the mind “marks the before unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension” (482). Shelley claims that poetry in this sense repositions the mind in its orientation to the world: When we are privileged with this attunement
by way of the aesthetic, we more fully comprehend the breadth and relational complexity of the universe in which we live.

Upon experiencing this universal pleasure from fitted interaction, minds "create afresh the associations" and "similitudes or relations" with regard not only to content (and, later, expression and production) but also capacity. The beauty that poetry initiates "is a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the hearer's mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which is has perpetual sympathy" (485). Beauty, by novelty, readies the mind for extension. The exchange awakens the mind to its own ever-increasing capability to function expertly and sympathetically in the world. In continual reformation, "[p]oetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whoes void forever craves fresh food" (488). Only through this aesthetic interaction that is set in motion by beauty can the mind hope to expand and transcend the limits of its own containment. Only when the mind like a lyre receives the pleasurable motions of these external forces does it know its potential for relation: for connection, life-saving and regenerative, within self and with other. This awareness for relation only occurs through the experience of beauty. From an aesthetic interaction that is by nature relational, poetry—and the pleasure it elicits—is all that enables man to be relational.

In "Truth and Lying," Nietzsche writes of art in remarkably analogous terms: Art, he writes, is both disruptive of and regenerative to the mind. He writes that art
"constantly confuses the cells and the classifications of concepts by setting up new translations, metaphors, metonymies; it constantly manifests the desire to shape the given world of the waking human being in ways which are just as multiform, irregular, inconsequential, incoherent, charming and ever-new" (882). The interaction with the aesthetic serves to revise what has become stale in the individual mind. Indeed, Nietzsche claims that the mind can transcend its self-containment only through this "aesthetic way of relating" (880). Although we naturally exist in spheres of existence that are isolated from one another, in which there can be "no causality, no correctness, no expression," or exchange, we are brought together by the "allusive transference" of the aesthetic (880). Beauty takes on a redemptive role as it introduces us to that which is beyond us; it resurrects our minds from the stagnation of self alone and occupies a "middle sphere and mediating force" that enables us to engage in fruitful relationship (880).

Nietzsche identifies this process as a sort of dialectic within the mind and, largely, in the world itself. Within art, there exists a certain "duality" of "drives" in the Apolline and the Dionysiac, "which [themselves] exist in a state of perpetual conflict interrupted only occasionally by periods of reconciliation . . ." (884). The Apolline governs "lovely semblance" in art whereas the Dionysiac is known by wild "intoxication" (885, 886). Nietzsche refers to their regenerative interplay as a "dialectical solution" in which "both of these artistic drives are required to unfold their energies in strict, reciprocal proportion" (888, 895). From their individual effects emerge both "wise calm" and "ecstasy and sublimity," as well as "measured limitation" and the
“mysterious . . . unity” of all things (886, 887). Nietzsche describes their offices and exchange as follows:

[T]he Dionysiac shows itself, in comparison with the Apolline, to be the eternal and original power of art which summons the entire world of appearances into existence, in the midst of which a new, transfiguring semblance is needed . . . If you could imagine dissonance assuming human form—and what else is man?—this dissonance would need, to be able to live, a magnificent illusion which would spread a veil of beauty over its own nature. This is the true artistic aim of Apollo, in whose name we gather together all those countless illusions of beautiful semblance which, at every moment, make existence at all worth living at every moment and thereby urge us on to experience the next. (894)

Nietzsche describes the human being as a “veil[ed] . . . dissonance” that is both resolved and furthered by the “perpetual conflict” inherent in the aesthetic (884). He proposes that this artistic dialogue is “intuitively” necessary for man to endure; and that, within the creative dialectic, there exists a certain reciprocity or relationship that enables humanity to persist (895).

A certain relational exchange seems essential at each stage of the encounter with the aesthetic: art itself operates by the relational opposition of its components; the aesthetic then bridges the spheres of self and other and forges a dynamic relationship between the two; and the mind of man, subsequently, experiences an enlargement impossible without the other. In short, beauty mediates personal transformation.
Shelley clarifies how the experience of beauty sympathetically broadens self-awareness and simultaneously situates man in the context of the world:

The great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. (487-488)

How might this kind of identification and selflessness be possible? Shelley, of course, looks to beauty as the only mechanism that can touch the relational foundation of man and, thus, the morality of man.\(^\text{17}\) He holds that the “great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause . . . Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb” (488). Shelley claims that poetry, an agential influence on the mind, stimulates certain faculties in such a way as to reinforce human morality. Although Shelley does not appeal to a simplistic model of causation (“We know no more of cause and effect than a constant conjunction of events”), he argues from empiricism: “Poetry is ever found to coexist with whatever other arts contribute to the happiness and perfection of man” (489). As all of mankind contains the same mental organization and becomes internally attuned according to the same aesthetic pleasure, it would follow that all minds are be predisposed to these same

\(^{17}\) Shelley specifically claims that the aesthetic reprieve we experience when we are captivated by beauty actually enriches certain mental capacities—including those that initiate human morality and relation to that which is other. We will explore these “principles,” as Shelley terms them, at length in a couple pages (Shelley 481).
influences. If we grant that poetry and the beauty it elicits in all minds does foster morality in humanity, we glimpse beauty’s enormous ethical and social implications. Based on nothing but a subjectively universal aesthetic interaction, it becomes possible to conclude that beauty moves us toward some sort of goodness and rightness toward others. Let us investigate this possibility.

Like Nietzsche and Shelley, Scarry also argues for the relationship inherent in the experience of beauty. In *Beauty*, Scarry proposes that every individual enraptured by beauty knows both “delight” and “demotion” (113, 114). She explains:

> At the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering . . . what happens, happens to our bodies. When we come upon beautiful things . . . they lift us (as though by the air currents of someone else’s sweeping), letting the ground rotate beneath us several inches, so that when we land, we find we are standing in a different relation to to the world than we were a moment before.

(111-112)

When we are graced with beauty and our minds enthralled in this “state of acute pleasure,” Scarry declares that we make room in our minds for that which is other (114). Indeed, beauty releases us from the mental confines of individual isolation and enriches us by way of relation. Scarry argues that beauty redefines the contours of the mind; through beauty, a “more capacious mental act is possible: all the space formerly in the service of protecting, guarding, advancing the self . . . is now free to be in the service of something else” (113). Our minds undergo transformation in response to this aesthetic delight, and we recognize the plurality of the contents of the universe.
Not only does beauty introduce us to others through relation, but it urges us toward a selflessness that promotes goodness and fairness to others. Scarry writes that beauty evokes a “pleasure-bearing” sense of “adjacency” that “seems a gift in its own right, and a gift as a prelude to or precondition of enjoying fair relations with others” (114). Beauty becomes a sort of aesthetic prerequisite for one mind’s relation with another; beauty becomes a foundation that enables and presses us toward ethical goodness (109).

Indeed, Shelley highlights the precise principles that beauty, by its very presence in the mind of the individual, amplifies. He claims that human sociability itself relies on certain principles, which, in turn, themselves are enriched by beauty alone (481). Shelley describes the relationship between sociability, principles, and beauty as follows:

The social sympathies, or those laws from which as from its elements society results, begin to develope themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist; the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed; and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence, become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action, inasmuch as he is social; and constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind. (481)

From these principles—equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence—arises human relation itself. These principles precede any outward action or expression as they enable both. It seems that we can relationally navigate the universe we perceive
because we are all comprised of internal principles that allow us to do so. As we have seen that the experience of beauty enlarges our minds, I will here demonstrate how beauty touches each of these mental constituents in a life-furthering way.

It is clear in the text just mentioned that Shelley thus pairs the principles with the products with which they are aligned: equality with pleasure in sensation; diversity with virtue in sentiment; unity with beauty in art; contrast with truth in reasoning; and mutual dependence with love in the intercourse of kind (481). How might the pleasure-filled, effortless exchange that is the experience of the beautiful touch these causal pairs? Let us imagine how a beauty actively delighting the mind might uniquely arouse each of the principles so as to augment each effect.

The relationship between equality and pleasure in sensation becomes clear after only a brief consideration of what constitutes beauty. There exists a certain equality between the individual and the world, the mind and the purposive object, in the experience of the beautiful, because the interaction itself is curiously mutual and fairly fitted. Pleasure in sensation only arises when each counterpart is privileged to complement the other by way of rightness in relationship. Scarry interprets the ancients when she says that “equality is the heart of beauty, that equality is pleasure-bearing, and that . . . equality is the morally highest and best feature of the world” (97-98). How much more satisfying is a glimpse of a rare species in nature than a photo session at a city zoo? The former contains no imbalance of power or control but rather exists fairly and freely. The result of equal interaction is gratifying.
If the prerequisite to virtue in sentiment is diversity, how might beauty favorably influence this principle so as to produce its consequence? We have seen from Shelley and Nietzsche that beauty and the aesthetic are all that allow for relation with that which is other. It would seem that a principle of diversity could not even be approached — let alone enhanced — without some access to otherness. Serving as this aesthetic access, beauty joins the mind with something external and, in so doing, opens the mind to all manner of otherness. This cultivates a diversity that allows for virtue—even virtue in sentiment or feeling. Allow me a negative explanation: Virtue would not exist if not for diversity, because to have virtue there must exist not-virtue. In a state of complete uniformity, there could be neither categories of virtue nor even virtue itself, because everything would be the same, indistinguishable. Diversity allows feelings and relations to be categorized and defined by difference. As beauty activates this internal diversity, the individual matures in a sympathetic knowledge of diversity in kind.

That the experience of beauty augments the internal principle of unity is clear by all classical descriptions of beauty in art. That which is beautiful traditionally contains elements of symmetry, balance, and closure. Scarry writes that in terms of beauty, “it is clear that the attribute most steadily singled out over the centuries has been ‘symmetry’ . . . The feature, despite [its] variations in emphasis, never ceases to be, even in eras that strive to depart from it, the single most enduringly recognized attribute” (96). Beauty fosters relational reciprocity, stable and contained, and, with quiet propriety, cultivates a dynamic similitude in the mind of man. Shelley writes that “Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that
which is most deformed: it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all reconcilable things” (505).

Beauty introduces us to that which is beyond us while simultaneously maintaining a larger togetherness, a composed universality across all things.

The principle of contrast that mediates the effect truth in reasoning seems similar to the earlier principle of diversity. The relational exchange that is the experience of beauty is all that allows us to approach the other and, thus, is all that allows for the inconstant and generative dialectic within the universe. Human beings jointly seek truth in thought and dialogue, which is what Nietzsche calls a "striving towards infinity" by a contrast that "reveals to us the playful construction and demolition of the world of individuality as an outpouring of primal pleasure and delight" (893). Our constructions of reality maintain restful "semblance" and reconciliation for brief moments in between raw periods of productive contrast (894). In this "dialectic solution ... a new world [is founded] on the ruins of the old one that has been overthrown” (888). Through the delight and awakening rendered by the aesthetic, we enter the chaotic pursuit of truth.18

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18 Scarry elaborates on this pursuit of truth that beauty initiates: “so pleasurable a mental state is [the beautiful] that ever afterwards one is willing to labor, struggle, wrestle with the world to locate enduring sources of conviction—to locate what is true” (31). She adds that “beauty is a starting place for education.” That the aesthetic might improve minds as it urges humanity toward knowledge and education is, historically, a huge consequent of beauty. The progression is indeed central to Schiller’s On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In my Chapter Three, I approach beauty’s implications more broadly—in a way that contains education but does not specifically address the consequent.
And we do this together. Beauty amplifies the principle of mutual dependence in the individual—a "social being"—that increases need for another (Shelley 481). Beauty alerts us to our endless capacity when we are together. In Promise, Nehamas writes that "as long as we find something beautiful we feel certain that it can still yield something of value, despite the fact that we don’t know what that is . . . beauty [is] the emblem of what we lack, the mark of an art that speaks to our desire, the ground of such a rush to converse . . . they quicken the sense of life, giving it shape and direction" (75-77). Shelley supposes that the feeling leads us into love in the intercourse of kind, a relationship about which Nehamas asserts the following: "To love something and to want to come to know and understand it can’t possibly be separated from each other, and that desire, far from closing us off from the world, leads us directly into it" (120). Beauty reshapes us, renders us dependent, and then leads us together into the world.

**Beauty Permits the Social**

Whether by the innate principles of mutual dependence, contrast, unity, diversity, or equality, beauty spurs personal transformation by the "good which exists in the relation" (Shelley 484). The principles themselves exist in the mind as a foundational metaphor for the relations that likewise permeate the universe: most basic to every individual are these mental components that, themselves, operate in conjunction with one another—not in uniformity but in ampliative uniqueness.

After beauty revamps us inwardly, it directs us toward, and even demands, the social. Shelley claims that these principles alone "afford the motives according to which
the will of a social being is determined to action” (481). Nehamas claims that the “desire beauty provokes is essentially social: it literally does create a new society, for it needs to be communicated to others and pursued in their company” (77). We must continue to forge new relations with others if we are to participate in the productive upheaval of all things, and we know that beauty encourages us according to this purpose. Beauty invites us to, what Scarry calls, “the search for something beyond [the beautiful that fills the mind], something larger or something of the same scale with which it needs to be brought into relation” (29). We are moved to position ourselves outwardly and to expand our relations communally, “to move forward into new acts of creation, to move conceptually over, to bring things into relation, and [to do] all this with a kind of urgency as though [our lives] depended on it” (30). It is from this urgency that we are enlivened and the world is sustained, and it is the process, purpose, and responsibility of expression that we now more fully consider.
Chapter Three

The Harmony

[I]t were superfluous to explain how the gentleness and the elevation of mind connected with these sacred emotions can render men more amiable, more generous, and wise, and lift them out of the dull vapours of the little world of self.

—Shelley, “Defence” 497

We have seen how the singular experience of beauty marks the mind of man in such a way as to enlarge his foundational principles, those that allow him to transcend the self and have access to the external. Shelley has demonstrated how the external motions that facilitate the feeling of beauty enter us and impress us. We respond like lyres being acted upon as we receive pleasurable—albeit, personal—melodies that change us and prepare us for the world.

As Shelley extends the metaphor of the lyre to include not just melody but harmony as well, he thereby introduces another feature of the lyre that more accurately describes the interaction between humanity and the world. Shelley maintains that man functions even more expertly than the lyre in that there exists a “principle within the human being . . . which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody, alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them” (480). We do not passively receive the impressions of
the world—we are not merely acted upon—but we rather embrace the exchange with internal agency: “It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound” (480). We simultaneously alter as we are altered. We not only exist as beings able to take in presentations, impressions, and sensations, but we are also able to position our minds intentionally in a relational synthesis with the world that, alone, propels us toward external exchange and sociability.

In contrast to melody, harmony becomes a mutually interactive process that transcends the self in both passivity and containment. In terms of its musical denotation, harmony is described as “the combination of (simultaneous) notes so as to form chords . . . [or] the structure of a piece of music in relation to the chords of which it consists” (“Harmony”). In order for a harmony to exist, there must first be multiple dissimilar components, and these individual parts must also synthesize in ways that produce pleasing effects.

Shelley claims that it is the enlargement and work of the poetic faculty—“which contains within itself the seeds at once of its own and social renovation” (493)—that makes possible the harmony that becomes society. The internal relations that beauty strengthens within the mind of man, in turn, prompt universal relation. This collective harmony is subject to endless possibility, as the ever-changing relations by which society is produced are unstable and revitalizing. Shelley writes that the effect of “poetry is infinite,” because the encounter with the aesthetic initiates a causal chain that, in fact, determines the fluid connections within the universe:
A great Poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an un conceived delight. (500)

Beauty sparks the infinite and eternal, because beauty guides man into harmonious participation with the world, thereby, engenders lasting repercussions. Contained within the experience of beauty is the “germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature” that give rise to the world, ever-new (485). Indeed, the passage of “Time . . . [only] augments that [effect] of Poetry, and for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains” (485). The world is made up of unstable relation and relational instability, both generative.

Such is the significance of the relational interplay of the world. Beauty offers a collectively dynamic avenue for relationship as it universally touches each mind “which is itself the image of all other minds” in subjective universality (485). Beauty then charges its recipients to be more and to make more—together. We are gifted with beauty and inspired to live in such a way that gifts the world with more. As Shelley first notes the “good which exists in the relation . . . between existence and perception,” he secondly appeals to the good found “between perception and expression” (482). The experience of beauty becomes a moment both reflexive and propulsive: it directs us inwardly as we consider the essence of ourselves and the universe that it complements
and, simultaneously, projects us outwardly as our transformation promises renewal for
the universe in which we live. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay "The Poet," discusses
these stakes of beauty regarding humanity and the world. He notes the trajectory of the
beautiful—equality in exchange, internal restoration in the individual—and presses us
to consider the subsequent expression of the individual who is rendered overflowing by
beauty. Emerson charts the progression of the transformed subject: "The
metamorphosis excites in the beholder an emotion of joy. The use of symbols has a
certain power of emancipation and exhilaration for all men. We seem to be touched by a
wand which makes us dance and run about happily, like children. We are like persons
who come out of a cave or cellar into the open air" (235).19 Beauty attunes our internal
faculties and revamps our social qualities such that it literally frees us to live purposed
and productive lives in the presence of others. When we come to know the joy in
beauty, we are thus prepared to add to the increasing wholeness of the collective, and
we do this in ways that are good and right. It is the shared response to beauty in terms
of personal expression and contribution that we explore here.

Beauty prompts the reproduction of the good. Beauty moves transformed people
to create; to increase and revise the stale contents of the world; and to offer enlarged
selves for the purpose of universal growth. Shelley writes that the "functions of the

19 Consider how this resonates with Plato's Republic, and with Plato's assessment of the
human condition in terms of the allegory of the cave:

'Imagine people living in a cavernous cell down under the ground . . . . What do
you think would happen, then, . . . if they were set free from their bonds and
cured of their inanity? What would it be like if they found that happening to
them? Imagine that one of them has been set free and is suddenly made to stand
up, to turn his head and walk, and to look towards the firelight. (Plato Repub 64,
65)
poetical faculty are two-fold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge, and power and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good” (503). By providing “new materials of knowledge” for the world, the poetic faculty in the mind is all that restructures the world, and beauty is all that restructures our minds. Beauty bolsters each poetic faculty, each person, with the capability to change the contents—and even capacity—of the world. Shelley describes the work of the aesthetic as follows: Poetry is a “prismatic and many-sided mirror, which collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them from the simplicity of these elementary forms, and touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and endows it with the power of propagating its like wherever it may fall” (491). As the aesthetic impresses and reflects on our minds, we are “endow[ed]” with the power to propagate.

According to Scarry, beauty requires us to “replicate” in “unceasing begetting” and “perpetual duplicat[ion]” (Scarry 5). No small example is the reproduction of human life based on the pleasure experienced between social beings. When we are captured in delightful connection with another person and are enraptured by overwhelming beauty, we respond with an action that is intrinsically reproductive. Our natural response is creative: we produce more people, who may then initiate more beautiful exchanges. Indeed, beauty not only offers us the opportunity to participate in the shaping of the world, but it even compels us to do so.
Beauty urges us to contribute our creativity for the good. Shelley asserts that as the aesthetic "spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, . . . it reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and . . . [i]t compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know" (505). Beauty inspires us to imagine a different present and then, promptly, leads us to create it. Those moved by beauty prophesy with their transformed minds and fulfill prophecy with their lives. Shelley calls those more sensitive to the affections and distribution of beauty, "Poets," and further describes their office: "Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadow which futurity casts upon the present . . . Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (508). Beauty lifts our minds out of rigid solitude and charges us to usher in the world we are now able to imagine. Scarry alerts us to the task ahead when she writes that beauty "comes to us, with no work of our own; then leaves us prepared to undergo a giant labor" (53). The "giant labor" with which we are charged is the renovation of the universe, the necessary renewal of all things. Beauty prepares us to envision and enact the improvement of our surroundings, which is creative and life-sustaining work.

Emerson reinforces the function of the "Poet, or the man of Beauty" as the one capable of establishing both novelty and rightness in the world (223). Emerson writes that the poet "re-attaches things to nature and the Whole,—re-attaching even artificial things and violation of nature, to nature, by a deeper insight" and that the poet, in "genius [, ] realizes and adds" (229, 226). Those sensitive to the affections of beauty
perceive the future that *will* be, and they endow the familiar and stale relations of life with a "power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes and a tongue into every dumb and inanimate object" (230). A word takes on a new meaning, a piece of fashion is resurrected for an altered purpose, an ingredient is combined with another in flavorful contrast. What had fallen into obsolescence has regained favor and purpose by the creativity that emanate from the man of beauty, who "realizes and adds" (226). The individual affected by beauty likewise perceives the essence and larger Whole of the universe and is able to articulate it with heightened accuracy. Emerson writes that the poet "sees through the flowing vest the firm nature . . . the great Order" (238, 230) and repositions each member of nature "in their right series and procession" according to the ordering of the Universe (230).

Through the agency of those overcome by the aesthetic, beauty takes on a reconciliatory and redemptive role as it restores good and right relations within nature itself:

With what joy I begin to read a poem which I confide in as an inspiration! And now my chains are to be broken; I shall mount above these clouds and opaque airs in which I live,—opaque, though they seem transparent,—and from the heaven of truth I shall see and comprehend my relations. That will reconcile me to life and renovate nature, to see trifles animated by a tendency, and to know what I am doing. (Emerson 226)

Beauty becomes emancipatory in the self-awareness it offers to its subjects: we realize our freedom to live as individuals amongst each other and within collective existence;
we are freed of our former limits and are released into the world to pursue greater
depths and truth. The novelist who, in frustration, leaves her half-written manuscript in
her cabin and retreats to isolated trails meets a doe and is moved to hope. She has
glimpsed some essence or insight into the nature of things, and she returns to her wood
fire and writes a new chapter. The couple who, married for decades, decide they need
time apart inhabit different cities and cannot but bring the qualities of strangers into
relation with their chosen loves; each remembers his and her chosen pursuit and returns
to the depths each, now free, longs to know. In *Education*, Schiller affirms that “it is only
through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom” (9). As we are delighted in
beauty, we throw off all to which we are enslaved and, subsequently, live in
beneficence. Alongside others, we are freed and moved to free.

We long for both, and beauty empowers us to be and do both. Emerson writes
that “we love the poet, [the expressor of Beauty,] the inventor, who in any form,
whether in an ode or in an action or in looks and behavior, has yielded us a new
thought. He unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene” (234, 236). Emerson
confirms that “[t]his emancipation is dear to all men” (236). We desire this awakening,
and poets thus become “liberating gods” who can unleash all people onto the
universe—to transcend, to create, to reproduce, to make relations, to make free. We are
offered the “magic of liberty, which puts the world like a ball in our hands” (236).
Plucked out of our prisons of selfhood, we are swept up in a purpose larger than
ourselves—to save others and the world—and are endowed with an agency, already
inherent, of which we become stewards.
The Exhortation

For all men live by truth and stand in need of expression.

— Emerson, “The Poet” 223

Beauty reminds us of our expert making and functioning in the world. We are led to express the overflow of the beauty in acts that revise ourselves as well society, in a process that appears inevitable and natural. Emerson thus describes the intuitiveness of expression: “Why should not the symmetry and truth that modulate these [organic expressions], glide into our spirits, and we participate the invention of nature?” (232, 233). When I look out over the frozen lake and view yesterday’s small, snowshoed steps against the backdrop of the rolling hillside, I marvel and sense a harmony larger than myself. I am moved to participate—whether that is in another snowshoe adventure across the lake, a paltry verbal expression to those with me of the beauty in it all, or the brief life example that it becomes in a project about beauty. The effects of beauty flow from me. “By God it is in me and must go forth of me,” declares Emerson (239). Why, then, does Kantian universal subjectivity—the intuitive appeal for universal assent in the declaration of the beautiful—even need to be expounded and defended? Kant argues that the ought to which aesthetic universal subjectivity moves all people is nothing but the universal resonance of mankind in the wake of a certain kind of relationship, the response to which is termed beauty. I have proposed in these pages,
too, that a certain kind of expression indeed follows the feeling of beauty, one that redeems oneself and all things.

Emerson's question—*How could we not assent to the life-saving procedure naturally propelled by beauty?*—becomes valid, because it is clear that all people in fact do not "participate the invention of nature" (233). For some reason, we leave the revision of our world to the poets, the leaders, and the visionaries, when it is true that the universe—which Emerson terms "the externization of the soul" (227)—could in fact be the externization of our souls. Moved by beauty, I have the opportunity to contribute a bit of my uniqueness to the external world in a work that is good and right. I have the agency to offer myself in productive symbiosis in the existence of which I am a member.

I have argued that beauty is not in the *form* of the expression and likewise cannot be bound to the product or captured by mere content but, rather, that "Beauty is the creator of the universe" (224). Beauty is the initiator; it is not the form but the *force*. The one who channels beauty "uses forms according to the *life*, and not according to the *form*" (230-231). Beauty spurs the overflow of life itself, and the expression is itself good: there is good in the expression. If the world is indeed the product of our souls' floodgates (released by beauty)—if indeed the contents of the universe are "symbols of the passage of the world into the soul of man, to suffer there a change and reappear a new and higher fact" (230)—then the expression cannot but be good if the expression is *fueled by beauty*. Emerson claims the following conditional: "Since every thing in nature answers to a moral power, if any phenomenon remains brute and dark it is because the corresponding faculty in the observer is not yet active" (228). Inherent in the feeling of
the beautiful is a harmony that declares mankind’s competence and endless capacity to exist well in the world. The internal quickening announces our position in the universe, which should be enacted with rightful power and beneficence. When we are brought into this self-awareness and accurate relation to the world—when our faculties are awakened and harmonized—that which proceeds from us is good. In his description of the overflow, Emerson exhorts: “All form is an effect of character; all condition, of the quality of the life; all harmony, of health; and for this reason a perception of beauty should be sympathetic or proper only to the good” (227). Let us know ourselves and know our opportunity to enrich everything around us. Let our expression—our “fearless, vivacious offspring, clad with wings (such [is] the virtue of the soul out of which they c[ome]) which carry them fast and far, and infix them irrecoverably into the hearts of men” — declare the wonder of our being to the benefit of all (232).

Beauty recruits all people for this purpose. Although we linger in our limitation, awaiting those whom Emerson calls the “interpreters” of this essential and creative power, we need not wait; for “every man is so far a poet as to be susceptible of these enchantments of nature; for all men have the thoughts whereof the universe is the celebration” (226, 228). We are stewards of our wondrous faculties, and we are delightfully vulnerable to aesthetic affections. Therefore, let us recognize our capability, and be trustworthy to declare it. Let us acknowledge and wield our responsibility to express that which is right and good. Let us participate in the unceasing creation and recreation of all things.
Look around: everyone and the universe is waiting. "[E]very one has some interest in the advent of the poet, and no one knows how much it may concern him" (226). Look to the despondent coworker, the disillusioned revolutionary, the dejected teenager, the wanting spouse. Look to the institutions entrenched in their own obsolescence, the systems perpetuated by their disavowal of value and virtue. Consider the dysfunction between every possibility of relationship: person to person, person to nature, nature to person. Acknowledge these relations, and feel discontent. Examine the world, and with effectual concern, realize that "[m]an, never so often deceived, still watches for the arrival of a brother who can hold him steady to a truth until he has made it his own" (226). Accept the current reality, envision a new, and precipitate its arrival. Emerson encourages: "Doubt not, O poet, but persist" (239). Shelley insists: "The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is Poetry" (508). Scarry charges: Beauty "creates, without itself fulfilling, the aspiration for enduring certitude. It comes to us, with no work of our own; then leaves us prepared to undergo a giant labor" (53). Know that you are mighty to hasten the arrival of a better age. The world is expectant, and you are able.
Conclusion

In order to lay hold of the fleeting phenomenon, he must first bind it in the fetters of rule, tear its fair body to pieces by reducing it to concepts, and preserve its living spirit in a sorry skeleton of words . . . What [is true, here,] of moral experience, must hold even more of the phenomenon we call Beauty. For its whole magic resides in its mystery, and in dissolving the essential amalgam of its elements we find we have dissolved its very Being.

—Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man 5

You, with your endowed faculties and wondrous capacity, will fail in your efforts to revitalize yourself and the world. You, with your affinity for creative relation and inclination toward purposeful relationship, will, at times, sever synthesis to your declination. You will become discouraged with your personal hope that is unmatched and unseen in the world. When you choose to live by Beauty—something that you choose not once but daily—you will, at times, be alone. When you decide to live for the glorious essence of all things and the analogous potential in all things, you will lose heart. Emerson assures plainly that the "world is full of renunciations and apprenticeships, and this is thine; thou must pass for a fool and churl for a long season" (240). To live to usher in the future is to live in constant tension: on the one hand, it is to know more and more deeply moments of personal and universal harmony; on the other, it is to know more and more acutely moments of not-harmony—moments of archaic discord and stagnation—which in truth are more frequent. To live in the
overflow of Beauty is to live concurrently in both worlds: the world that exists now, and
the world that is to come. To live to dream and to labor for your dreams is to endure all
manner of glory and disrepute, of peace and distress. To live by your life-saving
faculties is to live with risk and cost.

Yet if you refuse to live by anything less than the harmonizing ability in you,
which refreshes you and all things, you will be dissatisfied in your limitation, and you
will forever long for the unsafe hope for which you are aptly designed. Emerson implores
us to “persist,” to “[s]tand there, balked and dumb, stuttering and stammering, hissed
and hooted, [to] stand and strive”—but for what? (239-240). Thus, he writes, is our
“reward” for releasing our aesthetic overflow:

the ideal shall be real to thee, and the impressions of the actual world shall fall
like summer rain, copious, but not troublesome to thy invulnerable essence.
Thou shalt have the whole land for thy park and manor, the sea for thy bath and
navigation, without tax and without envy; the woods and the rivers thou shalt
own, and thou shalt possess that wherein others are only tenants and boarders.
Thou true land-lord! sea-lord! air-lord! (240-241)

If there is but a chance that the “ideal [could] be real to [me]”—and that the process
itself would involve all of the best of me—how could I not choose to exist for the
moments of Beauty and to live by its overflow? Though it is true that I am more often
captured in the moments between beauty, to recall even a shadow of my delight in
moments enraptured by Beauty is to know that I desire nothing else.
Beauty requires the best of each person and each community, and invites all to participate in universal creation and restoration. Nietzsche affirms:

Now, hearing this gospel of universal harmony, each person feels himself to be not simply united, reconciled or merged with his neighbour, but quite literally one with him... Singing and dancing, man expresses his sense of belonging to a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and talk and is on the brink of flying and dancing, up and away into the air above. (887)

We cannot but be delightfully changed and empowered by Beauty, which then carries us into lives of meaning and purpose. Our lives become universally important and contain lasting significance in light of, Nietzsche writes, “the arts through which life is made possible and worth living” (886). Plato confirms that “only in the contemplation of beauty is human life worth living” (Nehamas 137). Our lives are worth living, because our choices and responses can engender eternal effects.

Let us then yield to the aesthetic powers by which we can take part in the renewal of all things and, thereby, “take the cheerful hint of the immortality of our essence” (Emerson 236). As long as we are living and breathing in the world, we know that the opportunities are endless and that everything can be creatively used for Beautiful Good. Allow me an Emersonian benediction:

Wherever snow falls or water flows or birds fly, wherever day and night meet in twilight, wherever the blue heaven is hung by clouds or sown with stars, wherever are forms with transparent boundaries, wherever are outlets into celestial space, wherever is danger, and awe, and love,—there I Beauty,
plenteous as rain, shed for thee, and though thou shouldst walk the world over, thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble. (Emerson 241)
Works Consulted

Primary Sources


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