

instance, the taste predicates. But the very bringing together of a very wide range of domains from aesthetic, through moral all the way to epistemic modals, and future contingent matters, and offering a way to systematize the phenomena appearing in these domains, is an impressive achievement.

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Bradley Murray, *The Possibility of Culture: Pleasure and Moral Development in Kant's Aesthetics*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015, 160 pp.

To put it simply, everyone interested in Kant's philosophy and/or in the way art and nature connect to our morality and our culture, should read Bradley Murray's book. Reader-friendly and easily accessible even to those who have not spent their lives studying the philosophical giant that is Kant, Murray's book offers an intriguing insight into some of the often-neglected aspects of Kant's aesthetics. Beginning with the simple question, why is it ok for us to pursue aesthetic pleasures provided by art and nature, Murray not only manages to explain the relevance of aesthetic pleasure for our personal development and social wellbeing, but he does so by situating Kant's theory of beauty against a wider background of Kant's works, primarily his anthropology and moral psychology. While most of those who work on Kant's third *Critique* tend to either analyze it in connection to the first or the second *Critique* (i.e. either to Kant epistemology or to Kant's ethics), Murray manages to offer a new look at the third *Critique* by situating it against Kant's accounts of emotions, passions and culture, as developed in his *Lectures on Anthropology*, *Metaphysics of Morals*, *Toward Perpetual Peace* and his other works of more empirical bent. A result is an intelligible, clear, precise and above all informative book which motivates one to take up Kant and see his

aesthetics, as well as his overall philosophical system, in new light. In what follows, I will briefly present a chapter-by-chapter summary of the main claims, and I will end by raising some concerns for Murray's views.

Murray's mission is to show how Kant justifies his claim that pursuing aesthetic pleasure is morally relevant because doing so promotes our capacity to act effectively as moral agents. Therefore, various sorts of anti-aesthetic claims (such as those inspired by Rousseau, according to which marvelling at the beauties of art nurtures in people the pettiness of soul, deters people from engaging with political concerns and thus keeps them in servitude, or is expressive of one's self-indulgent tendencies) should be rejected. Pursuing beauty, devoting our time and resources to beauties and aesthetic pleasures, can help bring about happier life for an individual and more flourishing to the society. As Murray puts it in the Introduction, explaining Kant's view of social order developed in his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, people by nature exhibit a kind of 'unsociable sociability' i.e. they want to live in a society but they also want to be free from demands of social cooperation and left to pursue their own desires. Because the two are often incompatible, in that an individual is often faced with a challenge of balancing her desires and the obligations towards society, it is only through moral development that an individual can become socialized and capable of putting aside her inclinations. Equally important is development of one's capacities to exercise reason publically, i.e. to be guided by one's own understanding. As Murray shows, both of these aims—development of personal and social culture—can be served and promoted via the pursuit of aesthetic pleasures.

In the first chapter, Murray explains the centrality of individual's moral development for Kant's overall view of nature as ultimately hospitable for, and at the service of, humanity's moral progression. Passions and inclinations hold people back from acting from duty and keep them committed to pursuing their individual desires. Not only can this be detrimental for sociability generally, but it can eventually lead one to suicide, as it can easily happen that one is no longer able to provide for the material things one has been relying upon for one's happiness. While the pursuit of luxury (that is, pursuit of that which is agreeable to one) can initially be beneficial, in that it keeps one away from pursuing more bodily-based passions, in the long run, it is only the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure inspired by beauty that can indeed be beneficial for moral development. Two main functions of the experiences of beauty are of paramount importance here, claims Murray. First, its ability to cultivate in us the capacity to feel love, as stated in §29 of the third *Critique*, and its capacity to teach us to step back from our inclinations, due to its disinterested nature. The strength, beauty and appeal of Murray's book is in his construction of these two claims from Kant's numerous works, and in his showing their full theoretical and practical implications.

Second chapter is dedicated to the bond between beauty and love. The emotion of love fosters our moral development because it helps us distance ourselves from our inclinations, preparing us to love something apart from any interest. However, the step from enjoying natural beauty to feeling love is only made possible via the emotion of gratitude: as Kant sees it, the expe-

periences of beauty inspire in us a sense of gratitude towards whichever maker, actual or hypothetical, that created such beauty. This, in turn, mobilizes in us a desire to give to others out of love. This chapter is also insightful in explicating Kant's overall view on love and its connection to our morality and social interactions.

Chapter three turns to one of the most contentious aspects of Kant's aesthetic theory, his claim regarding the disinterestedness of judgments of beauty. Connecting Kant's account of disinterestedness as developed in third *Critique* with his account of 'contemplative pleasure' of beauty presented in his *Metaphysics of Morals*, Murray reconstructs the relevance of disinterestedness for moral development. Most significantly, the pleasure of beauty is contrasted to the pleasures of agreeable, which are not only connected to our desires, thus motivating us to pursue them, but foster our tendency to become attached to objects and to want to possess them. Nothing of the kind is the case with pleasures of beauty, given that no one can possess the beauties of nature. Disinterested character of the experience of beauty, understood as a lack of concern or desire for the object or its existence, has often puzzled Kant's readers in that it is not altogether clear how we can pursue the experience of beautiful objects without caring for their continual existence. But as Murray clarifies, central to disinterestedness is that "whatever desire I have for the object to exist is not central to the pleasure I feel" (48). A second aspect of disinterestedness, revelatory of Burke's influence over Kant, is that a desire to understand the object "does not occupy a prominent place in experiences of (...) pleasure" (49). Pleasures of beauty, in other words, are severed from intellectual (or emotional) pleasures that objects of beauty may provide, though this doesn't imply that the pleasure of beauty is radically disinterested. In other words, "it is not a state characterized by the application of absolutely no concepts, and it is not a state in which we attend to a special subjective object" (57). Murray is here careful to situate this aspect of Kant's theory against Kant's division between free and adherent beauty (where a desire to understand can coexist with the pleasure of beauty). Pursuing aesthetic pleasure makes it possible for us to distance ourselves from our desires and inclinations, and to bracket our concerns, and to do so in a pleasurable way which does not make a demand for self denial (as, for example, some other ways of pursuing moral wisdom might, as when the agent is supposed to rationally grasp the demands of pursuing his own duty).

In chapter four, Murray discusses our aesthetic interest in, and pleasure derived from, works of art. Two questions concern him; first, whether pursuing art can be beneficial to our moral development, and second, whether the experiences of aesthetic pleasures triggered by art can be analyzed along the same lines as experiences of pleasure derived from nature (i.e. via the notion of disinterestedness). One influential line of reasoning that Kant engages with concerns responding to Rousseau's anti-aestheticism. Not only can works of art foster problematic moral attitudes, thus distracting us from our moral duties, but it can easily happen that an interest in art is in fact a concern for one's own status and reputation. In other words, art lovers are not after moral development but after indulging their own vanity and status-seeking, concerned only with being envied by others for their good

taste. Such concerns can fuel passions which are detrimental for moral development, particularly a passion for recognition, for self indulgence and for one's status. While Kant is aware of this potentially inhibiting influence of art for our moral interest, he nevertheless thinks there might be good consequences to those engagements with artworks motivated by reputation and vanity: even in these cases, the underlying motivation of a vain person is a desire to communicate, to relate to another human being and to find some common ground, i.e. shared aesthetic taste, with others. Such concerns can contribute to one's moral development, even if one's initial motivation in pursuing art was not morally praiseworthy.

What about disinterestedness with respect to works of art? Because they are primarily artefacts, our engagements with them can inspire a desire to understand them, to know the original intentions of their makers and to know which purpose they aimed to fulfil. Such knowledge however undermines the attitude of disinterestedness, which in turn undermines the possibility of moral development. Nonetheless, Murray suggests, one's experience of artwork can still be disinterested, as long as one is able to undergo a process of abstraction, i.e. attend to the object as it strikes the eye. As Murray argues, this includes taking "a step back in our experience of the object so that this experience is not taken over by our desire to understand the object" (75). The more one is able to do this, the more disinterested one's experience of art is. Disinterestedness is thus a matter of degree. This chapter closes with an analysis of the notion of a genius and its relation to beautiful art. As Kant famously claims, beautiful art is only possible as a product of a genius, that is, as a product by someone who is oblivious to the roots of his art, but endowed with a gift of nature to produce beautiful artworks. However, as Murray objects, this kind of 'metaphysical' reading is problematic, in that one can admire an artwork for its beauty even if the artwork is in fact a product of copying rather than a product of original creation through genius. Murray therefore concludes that Kant's account of creation via genius should be understood 'epistemically'. "Kant's doctrine of genius is to function partly as extension of his account of abstraction" (77) claims Murray, which is to say that one should experience the artwork "as if it were the product of mere nature, rather than as the product of a determinate act of making" (77). Consequently, our experiences of artistic beauty include the representation of the work as a quasi-natural entity. This interpretation is in line with Kant's claim that genius is the innate mental aptitude through which nature gives the rule to art. Murray argues that this interpretation makes it easier for us to understand Kant's claims according to which an artwork appears as nature and doesn't exhibit any sign of having been intentionally created. We seek teleological understanding of natural entities, so our desire to understand the maker's intentions with respect to works of art can be accommodated under our wider teleological estimation. One aspect of artistic creation not easily resolved by Kant's theory is the fact that many of our artworks are not pleasing in light of their beauty (Murray analyses Duchamp's *Fountain* as a telling example) and that many are endowed with ethical dimension.

In the fifth chapter Murray's attention turns to sublime, whose relation to morality is far more intimate than that of beauty. But, wonders Murray,

how exactly does it foster our moral development, and why think that it does, when it is not connected to love but to the sense of respect and self-esteem? Another issue with the notion of sublime concerns its mixed nature; it is inherently contra-final and therefore displeasurable, and yet, it can be noted with an expression of approval. To address these issues, Murray first explicates the relevance of respect and esteem for our morality. A respect for the moral law itself is relevant, because humans are never completely free of passions and inclinations which deter us from following the moral law. Respect also matters as a pathological (rather than practical) feeling, designating a feeling of the dignity of human nature, which helps us act with greater impartiality. Finally, respect is also directed towards oneself, i.e. one's personhood. As a form of self-respect and self-esteem, derived from one's realization of, and appreciation of, one's rational nature, this feeling helps us fend off our animal inclinations and other 'worldly' concerns which should seem trivial when recognized as standing opposite to our rationality. Murray then goes on to analyze variations of sublimity, particularly mathematical, to explain the cognitive operation of our minds which are relevant for this experience, and mental states that Kant subsumes under sublimity (such as the feeling of disappointment with humanity). On the whole, Murray concludes that the experience of sublimity can serve our moral development because it is, like the experience of beauty, disinterested and pleasurable. However, Kant's account of sublime is not all together satisfying, as he does not in fact make enough effort to explore the connection between sublimity and art, i.e. artistic sublimity.

The sixth chapter is dedicated to what is perhaps the most challenging issue with respect to Kant's philosophy: that of justifying the pursuit of culture over and above the pursuit of one's inclinations. In other words, why strive toward moral progress (i.e. culture), when not doing so can make for a much more enjoyable life? To answer this challenge, Murray explores Kant's ethical writings, explicating Kant's arguments in favour of pursuing culture. He first explores a set of arguments designed from *Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Groundwork*. In *Metaphysics* Kant claims that pursuit of culture is a duty stemming from that aspect of ourselves that is unique to our humanity, our reason. Because reason induces us to strive toward perfection, we have to strive toward culture. In the *Groundwork*, Kant, developing the three formulations of categorical imperative, discusses the case of a man who contemplates turning his back to his talent. Kant concludes that it is impossible that a rational agent should will that anything like the maxim of enjoyment should become a universal law. Murray is here rather critical of Kant's argumentation, finding it unpersuasive: "Kant does not explain the key moves that he takes to support the relevant claim ... that there is a connection between humanity's being an end in itself and our having a duty to choose to pursue culture over pleasure" (109). Murray then explores Kant's second path to arguing in favour of culture, his argument from the Appendix to the Critique of Teleological Judgment, where Kant claims that a life spent in pursuit of enjoyment at the expense of culture is not compatible with living a worthwhile human life. Kant's argumentation here is complex and in order to present it in its fullness, Murray brings it in connection to Kant's views on the nature and humanity's end, on the connec-

tion between purpose and worth, on reflective and determinative judgement and the regulative use of reason. Murray concludes that this is another unconvincing way to ground Kant's insistence on the supremacy of culture over personal satisfactions, emphasizing two difficulties with the Appendix argument: "those relating to the interpretation of nature, and those relating to the claim that we are to think regulatively of humanity as the ultimate end of nature" (118). However, the Appendix argument is relevant for explaining the "ethical underpinnings of Kant's aesthetics" (118), concludes Murray, in that it provides support to those who are committed to pursuing culture, and it has a valuable role in fending off anti-aesthetics arguments.

Finally, in conclusion, after summarizing the main claims of the book, Murray addresses two further questions: the moral relevance of the experiences of ugliness, and the status of the empirical elements within Kant's aesthetics. With respect to the possible moral relevance of ugliness, Murray only sketchily hints at the possibility that ugliness, which triggers displeasure, might in fact be connected to our feelings of hatred and ingratitude. These, in turn are likely to make it harder for us to resist our inclinations and consequently, to make us self-centered and therefore isolated from others. Regarding the empiricism in Kant's aesthetics, Murray emphasizes the role that Kant's pragmatic anthropology (i.e. his view of culture, which rests on his views concerning what human beings tend to be like, that is, what they make of themselves) plays in his elaboration of the connection between aesthetics and morality. Murray is here primarily concerned with justifying the inclusion of empirical claims into a philosophical investigation, particularly into those such as Kant's—recall that Kant's aesthetic theory is primarily concerned with an a priori account of the justification of aesthetic judgments. However, concludes Murray, "although Kant is against empiricist accounts of *aesthetic judgments* such as Burke's, this does not mean that Kant's *aesthetic theory* rests on theses that are wholly a priori" (134, italics original).

Given the complexity of Kant's overall philosophy, combining his anthropological writings with his aesthetics in order to make the bond between aesthetic pleasure and moral development stronger is certainly not a small task. Murray is to be complimented for his skills in systematising, as well as for the detailed and meticulous analyses he conducts with respect to each of Kant's claims he scrutinizes. It is worth pointing out that Murray's analysis of the relation between aesthetics, anthropology and ethics in Kant's philosophy is not severed from other Kantians' positions, and while he does not engage with polemics and debates in the main text, the footnotes to each chapter provide for insightful pointers on views of other scholars and Murray's position compared to theirs.

There is however always a problem of choice, and one can wonder why Murray neglects taking into account several issues that figure prominently in Kant's account of the connection between aesthetic judgment and culture. For example, surprisingly little is said regarding the sociability, and the interconnection of *sensus communis*, sociability and communication (particularly regarding Kant's treatment of these in §§ 39–40 of the third *Critique*). Another aspect of Kant's third *Critique* suspiciously absent from Murray's analysis is a distinction between (and the implied relevance of both) empirical and intellectual interest in beauty. Perhaps less important for the ques-

tion of sociability, but significant for how one comes to appreciate beauty, is Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty (§ 17), which is also surprisingly neglected in Murray's reading. The book could also profit if more space was given to a topic that Murray only sketches, namely, the connection between ugliness and hatred. While it would be interesting to hear more on why someone would deliberately go after experiences of ugliness (particularly if this was considered as a variant of Hume-inspired questions regarding the unpleasant feelings that are part of our experience of viewing tragedy), it would be interesting to see if the experiences of ugly (i.e. pursuit of aesthetic displeasure) might somehow figure in the explanation of the aesthetics of shock, or in pursuits of 'ugly' or 'painful' art. The narrowness of Murray's approach of course parallels the narrowness of Kant's theory of art, as grounded in the 18th century conception of art, but it is worth pointing out that Murray occasionally makes a welcome effort to evaluate Kant's views from the perspective of some contemporary artistic trends and practices.

Irrespective of these 'omissions' (which do not necessarily hamper the overall insightfulness of the book), I do have some worries regarding Murray's analysis. First, I wonder how plausible his account of disinterestedness (with respect to nature as well as to art) is. Of course, Kant himself, as often emphasized by his commentators, shoots for the moon and famously misses, when he demands that aesthetic judgment be disinterested. Murray's solution, according to which what suffices for disinterestedness is that a desire for the object's existence not be central to the pleasure one feels, while theoretically satisfying, might be tricky from the practical perspective: is it really possible for one to gain such a clear perspective on one's pleasure to say with certainty which aspect is central, and which only secondary, to the experience? With respect to art, Murray's claim that disinterestedness is a matter of degree dependent on how far one is capable of abstracting, seems more convincing with respect to some art forms than with others. While one may marvel at the form of the statue or a symphony, it is hard to understand how we might approach literary works or works of narrative art in such a way. The tension here is as much a problem for Kant as it is for Murray.

Second, Murray's analysis of aesthetic ideas seems superficial. Murray makes a valid point in raising concerns regarding the metaphysical account of aesthetic ideas—we can indeed marvel at the beauty of a well crafted copy and mistake it for the original. However, while Kant can be criticized for having missed this possibility, it is worth remembering that his account of aesthetic ideas is primarily put forward to explain creation of art, not its reception—he barely says anything explicit regarding the audience's take on aesthetic ideas. Kant however makes a substantial effort to explain the relevance of aesthetic ideas for a moral development, and Murray is completely silent with respect to it (although explaining the moral relevance of our aesthetic pursuits is his prime concern in this book). Kant's claims in §52, where he urges beautiful art to be connected with moral ideas provides, on my understanding of Kant's aesthetic ideas, for a firm connection between art and our moral development. It is disappointing that Murray ignores it altogether.