

## A Lack of Feeling in Kant: Response to Patricia M. Matthews

Patricia M. Matthews begins her ambitious and provocative essay, titled "Kant's Sublime: A Form of Pure Aesthetic Reflective Judgment" (*The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 [1996]: 165-180), with the assertion that judgments of taste "are inherently puzzling" (p. 165). I wholeheartedly agree, yet I find her explication of Kant, as well as her conclusions (that "this way [of understanding the sublime] offers a solution to the major criticisms raised against judgments of the sublime ... In addition, this reading of Kant illustrates the centrality of feeling in Kant's system of the mind" [p. 178]), still more puzzling.

Matthews designates the project of the third *Critique* as follows: "Kant articulates the problem of taste as a problem about how people can agree about judgments based on a feeling of pleasure" (p. 165). I would instead assert that, first, nowhere in the third *Critique* is Kant concerned with "how people can agree about judgments," because the *possibility* of that agreement already occurs as the ground of aesthetic judgment (any *actual* agreement in judgment between people would be empirical and contingent); second, to characterize the Kantian project as a concern about agreement between people is to deflect attention away from the "puzzle" that is taste toward some theory or another regarding communication or, as in Matthews's case, toward ethics (via a circuitous route through "feeling"). In short, the Kantian problem of taste is neither a problem of communication nor a problem for ethics, though Matthews would have it be both.

Matthews's task in her essay is to defend the purity of judgments of the sublime despite the claims by Schaper, Crawford, and Crowther to the effect that the sublime is not disinterested enough, or too akin to moral judgment. While I have no interest in defending the position(s) of Schaper, Crawford, Crowther et al. regarding any sort of affinity between the sublime and moral judgment, I am nonetheless perplexed as to why Matthews argues for the purity of the category of the sublime only in the end to assert a deep, original, and shared intimacy between it and moral judgment. As she puts it:

The challenge, then, is to demonstrate that the feeling of sublimity makes up a category of feeling that is parallel to beauty and not simply an assimilation of moral feeling, and at the same time to explain why judgments of the sublime are closely linked to moral judgment. (p. 166)

Matthews's strategy appears then as a kind of parallelism: the feeling of sublimity parallels that of beauty. I find this strategy cunning. Though its benefit lies in the support it gives

to the sublime as a self-standing category, it nonetheless maintains an autonomy of the sublime from beauty only in order to assert a *linkage* to moral judgment: "I shall argue that judgments of the sublime are grounded in a parallel way: they are based on a disinterested feeling that is rooted in the structure of moral judgment" (p. 166). (Nota bene: this is no mere parallelism between sublime and moral judgments; that is, it is not merely that judgments of the sublime are akin to moral judgments because both are based on a disinterested feeling; rather, judgments of the sublime "are rooted in ... moral judgment.") Hence, the strategy of parallelism allows, in the end and despite Matthews's express disclaimer, for a more sweeping and total assimilation of the sublime into moral judgment than has yet, to my knowledge, been offered.

I want to contest this assimilation, in particular by contesting a still more sweeping assimilation performed by Matthews: the collapsing together of feeling and reflective judgment, Matthews concludes her essay as follows:

Human beings have mental faculties for both knowing and acting, but they also have a faculty for reflection that responds to the basic structure of these faculties. This faculty is feeling: when it responds to the harmonious relationship of the powers involved in cognition, we recognize beauty: when it responds to the harmonious relationship of the powers involved in moral judgment, we recognize the sublime. (p. 178)

I have four objections to this conclusion: 1) It implies that Kant's doctrine of aesthetic judgment is instead a doctrine of feeling. I find this unacceptable because there is, in the third *Critique*, no doctrine of feeling, especially not one assigning it a faculty. Matthews might well be accused of the same charge Burke leveled against Hutcheson: the fabrication of a faculty for each and every sentiment, or in this case all sentiment (Burke: "as if the Taste were a separate faculty of the mind, and distinct from the judgment and imagination"). 2) Absent from her conclusion is any trace of the role or effects of *any* faculty of judgment, and in particular the faculty of reflective judgment. 3) We can "recognize" neither beauty nor the sublime. Recognition, for Kant, insofar as it depends upon concepts or criteria, can play no part in aesthetic judgment. Matthews explicitly realizes this, and claims that the recognition she intends is not conceptual or cognitive—but it remains unclear just what this might mean. Still, it makes no sense, at least on Kantian grounds, to assert that one recognizes the beauty of a rose. 4) Matthews's concluding sentence seems to be circular, and hence empty. This explains why, in the midst of propounding a doctrine of feeling, she reverts to a term like recognition. If I am right in disallowing her the use of the term recognize—and if I am right to substitute "feeling" for it—her conclusion would then read:

This faculty [of reflection] is feeling: when it [feeling] responds to the harmonious relationship of the powers involved in cognition, we recognize [feel] beauty: when it [feeling] responds to the harmonious relationship of the powers involved in moral judgment, we recognize [feel] the sublime, (p. 178)

If, as Matthews asserts, the sublime is grounded in a feeling rooted in moral judgment, then Matthews's achievement in her essay is the total usurpation of the category of the sublime by that of moral judgment. Hence the meaning of the term "pure" in Matthews's title refers not to the distinctness of judgments of the sublime, but rather to their shared origin in the purity of "the basic form of moral judging" (p. 178).

One final query: What is feeling? And do we really gain any more purchase on, or with, this term than we have achieved by way of (aesthetic) judgment? Professor Matthews has staked out a bold and fruitful claim in her essay. It is one that deserves and will sustain further philosophical elaboration.

TOM HUHN  
Department of Philosophy  
Wesleyan University  
Middletown, Connecticut 06459