

Kant on the feeling of life in aesthetics and beyond

In the context of the contrast between the beautiful and the sublime, Kant writes that unlike the sublime, '(the beautiful) directly brings with it a feeling of the promotion of life [*Beförderung des Lebens*]' (CPJ 128 [5:244]). This claim hasn't attracted much attention in the literature but I would like to focus on it today, for I believe that it brings up an interesting puzzle. When Kant defines pleasure as 'the representation of the agreement of an object or of an action with the subjective conditions of life' (CPrR 5:9fn), what I take him to mean is that what I am aware of when I feel pleasure is that I am being affected by an object or an activity in a way that agrees with me: it furthers my ends, my desires, my interests, my activity, and so on (and vice-versa for the counter-purposiveness of displeasure). Yet the puzzle is that Kant's claim that the beautiful is accompanied by a feeling of the promotion of life may seem in tension with the account of feeling just delineated. For the experience of beauty is the opposite of the attainment of an end or an interest: 'the pleasure in the beautiful is neither a pleasure of enjoyment, nor of a lawful activity, and not even of a contemplation involving subtle reasoning in accordance with ideas, but of mere reflection.' (CPJ 5:292). Therefore, the feeling of the promotion of life in the experience of beauty cannot be the result of the satisfaction of a desire, an interest or an end. So why is life promoted in the experience of beauty? My aim in this paper is to answer this question.