

The Stoic Influence on Kant's Conception of the Feeling of Life

In this paper, I aim to show the way in which Kant's account of the feeling of life [*das Lebensgefühl*] might be influenced by the stoic notion of *oikeiōsis*. In the first part of the paper, I present a coherent account of *oikeiōsis*, which is usually translated as "familiarity," "affinity," "appropriation" or "belonging to one's own self". According to the stoics, *oikeiōsis* is the natural disposition of all living beings including humans and serves as the foundation of all ethical action. *Oikeiōsis* can be interpreted to mean the natural sentiment of living creatures that involves a primitive sense of self-worth, which in turn allows them to love themselves and be motivated to preserve their lives. Thus, *oikeiōsis* also requires a primal self-awareness or self-perception, i.e., the awareness of things as belonging to oneself, which in turn would allow living beings to act in a way that serves self-preservation. The inclination to preserve one's life leads living organisms to move towards pleasure and avoid displeasure. For the feelings of pleasure and displeasure are considered to be indicators of promotion and inhibition of life, respectively. In this regard, it is a natural inclination of the humans and animals alike to *feel* affinity with themselves, value their lives, and consequently, seek and maintain a pleasurable state. Since the feeling of *oikeiōsis* appears to be present not only in animals but also in plants, it functions as the first "animating principle" of animals and plants allowing them to act in a way that protects and maintains a state proper to their particular nature.

After presenting the stoic theory of *oikeiōsis*, in the second part of the paper, I argue that Kant's account of aesthetic pleasure and its relationship to the "feeling of life" can be better understood in light of the aforementioned stoic assumptions. In the very beginning of the Analytic of the Beautiful in the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant states that "the representation of [beautiful objects] is related entirely to the subject, indeed to its feeling of life, under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, [...] of which the mind becomes conscious in the feeling of its state (KU, 5: 204, §1). In other words, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure (as Kant explains later in the third *Critique*) is the indication that the mind is in a harmonious state, in which all the faculties of the mind are acting according to their particular nature. Thus, the feelings of aesthetic pleasure and displeasure is a kind of feeling that allows us to be conscious of our mental life and the activity of our faculties, i.e., whether our mental faculties are acting in conformity with their characteristic nature or not. As this paper will demonstrate, following the stoic philosophers, who assume that pleasure and displeasure are indicators of the degree of harmony between the subject and its environment, Kant takes the feelings of pleasure and displeasure as the degree of harmony of our mental faculties. Similarly, following the stoic philosophers, Kant claims that the feeling of aesthetic pleasure is "a feeling of the promotion of life" (*Gefühl der Beförderung des Lebens*), the feeling of aesthetic displeasure is the feeling of inhibition of (mental) life (KU, 5: 244-245, §23).