

Being 'out in the Territory,' or Belonging through Hope

Thanos SpiliotakarasPhD Department of Philosophy, State University of New York at Buffalo, USA. ✉ <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/kant.99017>

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Kant on freedom, nature, and judgment: The territory of the third critique is Kristi Sweet's second monograph on Kant, after her initial *Kant on Practical Life: From Duty to History*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2013. It is a novel interpretation of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* centered around the notion of hope. Contrary to philosophical commentaries focused exclusively on either aesthetics or teleology, Sweet suggests reading all parts of the text as internally unified under Kant's famous third question at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely the question 'what I may hope for?' Previous scholarly attempts on the third *Critique* have not thematized how the notion of hope constitutes the guiding thread of the text itself. The problem of bridging the gulf between freedom and nature is, according to Sweet, the problem of overcoming the indifference of nature to humanity through hope. The new vision of nature Kant proposes – a nature hospitable, fit or amenable, to what is distinctively human – is given from the perspective of hope. In what follows, I will reconstruct Sweet's argument, going through the chapters of the book. Afterwards, I will raise a few objections, and I will conclude with a general comment on the scholarly import of the work.

Chapters 1 and 2 present the core of Sweet's interpretation. The starting point is Kant's faculty of reason, whose nature is to always seek the ultimate condition for every given condition, and, therefore, an internally unified whole or totality of everything under its purview. This is the desire of rational intelligibility (towards a rational whole of natural order) of theoretical reason, but also of moral intelligibility (towards a totality of coordinated human ends) of practical reason. Such objective cannot be satisfied from within reason itself, because it always meets an exteriority that cannot be annexed under its purview: nature. Our faculties cannot produce an appearance of the totality theoretical reason strives for, nor can practical reason produce the moral world where the highest good – natural good of happiness caused by virtue – obtains. However, the latter case is destructive for morality itself: if the highest good is impossible, then it is irrational to be moral. This is the juncture where the notion of hope enters the picture: hope is the human answer to the predicament of the frustration of reason by the exteriority of nature. We hope that nature can be such that it will not annul our moral vocation. Thus, the object of hope is the possibility of satisfying reason in a new conception of a nature amenable to the demands of morality. Kant creates the space required for this new conception of nature through the technical notion of the territory, Sweet claims, which appears in Kant's geographical and geopolitical metaphors. Sweet eloquently reconstructs Kant's metaphor: the faculties of understanding and reason constitute domains of legislative authority erected upon a territory of objects, just like two distant cities erected as domains of administration and jurisdiction upon some land, or soil, connecting and separating them. The open territory separating nature, the domain where understanding legislates, and freedom, the domain where reason legislates, is the mediating space where reflective judgment operates without legislation. In the notion of reflection, Kant introduces a distinctive mental activity that constitutes an attempt to make intelligible, or interpret, a set of objects, like beautiful things or living beings, which cannot be annexed into a domain, but are rather encountered in the open territory. Regarding beautiful things in particular, Kant describes a consciousness, through the feeling of pleasure, of the harmony or attunement between how the world is and our mental capacity to access it. However, Sweet notes, this harmony or attunement is not the identity between mind and world of traditional metaphysics. Instead, it is a consciousness of belonging to a larger whole – the domains of nature, freedom, and the territory – beyond the legislative purview of the human mind, through the feeling of the non-predetermined fittingness of the world to the mind. In other words,

reflection 'out in the territory,' as Sweet writes numerous times, grants humans a sense of a new cosmic whole that exceeds human reason, which is only a part of it. This point is crucial for Sweet, as it reaches far beyond the objective of completing a system of faculties: it essentially redefines the place of human beings for Kant. Whereas the Copernican turn of the first two *Critiques* places the human at center of a cosmos, as a source of its meaning, the notion of the territory in the third *Critique* displaces such centrality. This new 'cosmos' is indifferent to human interests and needs and can only be approached via hope. All Chapters following expand on the above core interpretation, by illustrating how key moments and notions in Kant's text consolidate it.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 show how the key Kantian notions of life, of *sensus communis*, and of genius and aesthetic ideas, fit Sweet's overarching argument. Life for pre-critical Kant denotes the union of force and matter, and this notion is echoed, Sweet thinks, in the union between freedom and nature that reason demands, and on which judgments of reflection are patterned. That can be seen more lucidly in Kant's account of the ideal of beauty, as the standard or measure of the maximally beautiful individual instantiation, which can only be found in the human being. A beautiful human being is one whose natural appearance in its figure – the sensible – is thoroughly determined or animated by the rational idea of freedom – the supersensible. The beautiful human being is a human being whose movements, gesture, or comportment, are wholly determined through moral ends. Thus, Sweet argues, a beautiful human figure manifests 'life' as a union of matter and force, precisely because it aesthetically presents the union of freedom and nature that reason seeks and that is the object of human hope.

Then, the Kantian notion of *sensus communis* is discussed. *Sensus communis* is argued to constitute the transcendental ground of judgments of reflection and, thus, of the entire system of the faculties out in the territory. This can be seen in Kant's deduction of the judgments of taste, where *sensus communis* is taken to be an 'original fact' that gives right or legitimates the claim to the universal assent of the pleasure felt. That original fact, Sweet claims, is the most basic sense of commonality in human communication, evident in Kant's implicit assumption that all humans universally share the same faculties. Kant's *sensus communis* is the epistemic consciousness of our own mental state in the coordination of our faculties, referring at the same time to the socio-practical possibility of its communication among human beings – a definition that merges, according to Sweet, the two traditional employments of the term: the epistemological (from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes), and the socio-practical (from Roman Stoicism, through Vico, to Scottish Enlightenment).

Subsequently, Sweet discusses genius and aesthetic ideas. The gist of the argument here is that humans communicate with nature through the gift of genius that nature bestows to the artist producing a beautiful work of art. Nature communicates with us in beauty in general, either directly – in the cipher of natural beauties – or mediately – through the gift of genius in art. In both cases, a supersensible substratum to the natural order is revealed, just as *sensus communis* reveals a supersensible substratum for human beings in human communication. The object of hope is the supersensible kinship between the former and the latter, in the union between nature and freedom that can only be thought from the standpoint of the territory.

In the final chapters 6 and 7, Sweet moves to Kant's teleology in the second part of the *Critique*. In the language of the guiding metaphor, while in aesthetic judgments humans sense their belonging to a larger cosmos of both nature and freedom by experiencing the territory of the system, in teleological judgments humans discern the contours of the domain of nature in its relation to the domain of freedom from their territorial vantage point. Kant builds the argument of that portion of the text, Sweet suggests, as follows: he, first, admits the problem of contingency of nature, namely the fact that mechanism cannot yield complete intelligibility of nature. Nevertheless, an instance of such inexplicable by mechanism nature, living beings, prompts us to reflectively arrive at the concept of a natural end. Our encounter with living beings, then, gives us a justification to further employ the teleological principle of reflection to overcome the problem of contingency and give meaning to nature as a whole. Therefore, by situating natural products and their relations in a teleological context, we arrive at the concept of nature as a system of ends with an ultimate end, which we come to identify with the human being in virtue of its moral end-setting capacity, its autonomy and freedom. This means that the end of the system of nature is eventually found outside of it, in the final end of human beings in the domain of freedom. Such conception of a purposive nature inevitably leads to the concept of an intentionally acting cause of such system, an intelligence whose will intends such a world. This is the argument for the existence God presented in Kant's ethicotheology, which is substantially different from Kant's arguments given before, according to Sweet, as it arises from a disinterested reflective standpoint in the territory of the system – rather than from an interested standpoint from within the domain of freedom, as, for instance, in the argument found in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. Finally, faith is the last piece of Kant's argument: faith in God rests on the traces of the supersensible in the sensible that nature provides in the organization of living beings, which incites the teleological reflection that leads the aforementioned concept of God. Our hope for the realization of our moral vocation within the natural order is precisely sustained by faith.

Sweet concludes the book by claiming that the question 'what I may hope for' is nothing other than a question of the meaning and destination of human beings, as rational moral beings, or the question 'why things exist' from a human standpoint, amidst the danger of existential despair in a cruel world. Despite the answer lying beyond what humans can comprehend, our encounter with beauty and life gives us reason to hope that human beings exist to be good, and that the good done will not be in vain.

Having presented the main thesis and the structure of the text, I will now raise a couple of objections against specific points made by Sweet, rather than against her main line of interpretation. The first concerns the discussion of the ideal of beauty in Chapter 3. Sweet mentions several times that the ideal of beauty

gives us the original pattern for *all* judgments of taste, “as the epitome and culmination of what *all* judgments of taste are” (p. 202). However, Kant rejects free beauty (and the pure judgment of taste) as a candidate for beauty resting on an idea, and admitting an ideal. He rather holds that such an ideal applies only to a case of adherent beauty (namely, human beauty), and occurs in a partly intellectualized, rather than pure, judgment of taste. Although Sweet quotes Kant on this point (p. 95), she does not clarify how her claim that the ideal of beauty is the pattern for all judgments of taste can stand against that apparently contradictory statement by Kant. A solution would have been to provide an additional account of how the union between the sensible and the supersensible is also manifested in the free beauties of nature. Exegetically, that would require a different route, as it is hard to see how a beautiful wildflower, for instance, manifests ‘life,’ or the determination of the sensible by the supersensible, in the same manner a human figure does. If that additional account is not possible, or Sweet does not hold that life is also manifested in free beauties, then the reader could be given an explanation of why the exclusion of free beauties is not a problem for the proposed interpretation.

The second objection concerns an aspect of Sweet’s take on *sensus communis* in Chapter 4. Sweet dismisses at the beginning of the chapter (pp. 109-110) the claim that *sensus communis* can be anything other than an original fact. This is based on the formal structure of the deduction, as a very particular genre of legal text in Kant’s time (which Henrich’s influential historical reconstruction has shown). Consequently, she dismisses interpretations, such as Kalar’s, seeing *sensus communis* as a regulative ideal, and therefore “something futural ... [that] cannot be a legitimate ground of judgment’s claim to assent” (p. 110). However, and despite the form of the deduction as a textual genre, Kant concludes the ‘Analytic of the Beautiful’ in §22 with a paragraph on the question whether *sensus communis* is a constitutive principle of the possibility of experience or the product of a regulative principle of reason, leaving the answer in abeyance, as a matter that cannot be investigated there (Kant, 2000, 5:240). The fact, nevertheless, that Kant poses the question as warranting an investigation in the first place means that the answer is not as straight-forwardly evident as Sweet takes it to be – let alone the syntax of Kant’s rhetorical question in that paragraph being crafted to predispose the reader towards the second alternative. Hence, I believe that Sweet owes the reader a more convincing justification for her rejection of the alternative, including a direct engagement with Kant’s aforementioned passage and an examination of what *sensus communis* as a regulative ideal would amount to.

Despite the above objections, *Kant on freedom, nature, and judgment* does not only feature the virtues of an insightful and original interpretation, showcasing philosophical proficiency and rigor. More importantly, the text is set to leave a lasting mark in the field, by introducing new concepts – like the concept of the territory of the system of, or the concept of the cosmic whole. Likewise, certain major claims made by Sweet – such as the claim that the third *Critique* displaces the human centrality of the Copernican turn of the first two *Critiques*, through the expanded notion of cosmos it entails, or the claim that the Kantian harmony or attunement between mind and world differs substantially from the identity of traditional metaphysics – will become reference points in the years to come. Finally, I think Sweet’s brilliance also lies in her ability to always contextualize technical discussions within a bigger picture that the reader never loses sight of. In that sense, the *Critique of the Power Judgment* is not seen by Sweet as unified merely by the technical notion of reflective judgment, or the notion of purposiveness, which is a common move by Kant commentators. Rather – Rather, reflective judgment is indexed to the central theme of hope, as the human stance on the predicament of the new cosmic order human beings find themselves in. – By doing so Sweet opens up a new perspective for Kant readers: Kant devises philosophical solutions in order to face the deeper existential question of what it means to be human. I firmly believe that *Kant on freedom, nature, and judgment* is destined to become a classic in Kant scholarship.

References

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