

Kantian Ontological Aesthetics: Of Shedding Light on Contemporary A.I. Art Controversies

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ENG Abstract: As artificial intelligence redefines everything, including creative production, the argument for a renewed necessity for grounding is ever more pronounced. In this paper, I take the Kantian transcendental aesthetics to be the clearest voice in addressing these controversies in contemporary arts. Drawing on Kant's "Critique of Judgment", I contend here that the universal validity claimed in aesthetic judgment, particularly evident in debates surrounding A.I.-generated art, cannot be adequately explained by any available alternatives. By critically analysing Kantian concepts: disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness without purpose, and subjective necessity, I demonstrate in this treatise that modern responses to A.I. art expose a deep-seated crisis in Aesthetic Theory—one that only the transcendental analysis can sufficiently address. The paper argues that Kantian Aesthetics provides the most coherent framework for understanding why A.I.-generated work can evoke genuine aesthetic responses, whilst maintaining the normative standards necessary for critical discrimination. Positioned with the Analytic Method on Philosophy of Arts, I integrate in this endeavour rigorous conceptual analysis with contemporary aesthetic challenges to propose that Kant's account of aesthetic judgment—properly understood in its subjective, yet universally valid character—lends the sturdiest foundation for addressing the ontological and epistemological questions raised by "artificial creativity". I conclude this investigation by offering that fuller ontological grounding of aesthetic judgment may require extending Kantian transcendental philosophy towards the metaphysical commitments implicit in Kant's own broader critical project.

Keywords: Analytic Philosophy on Contemporary Arts, Kantian Aesthetics, A.I. generated Art, Issues in Contemporary Arts Appreciation, Transcendental Aesthetics.

Summary: I. Introduction: The Crisis of Aesthetic Judgment in the Age of Artificial Intelligence ; II The Problem of Intentionality, Creative Agency, and Genius: Revealing the Deeper Crisis; The Transcendental Argument: Kantian Aesthetic as the Necessary Framework; III The Transcendental Argument: Kantian Aesthetic as the Necessary Framework; IV. Conclusions: The Necessity of Transcendental Aesthetics and the Question of Ontological Grounding

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I. Introduction: The Crisis of Aesthetic Judgment in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The emergence of artificial intelligence as a creative force represents perhaps the most profound challenge to aesthetic theory since the advent of photography in the nineteenth century. When Jason Allen's A.I.-generated work "Théâtre D'opéra Spatial," created using Midjourney, won first place in the digital arts category at the Colorado State Fair in 2022, it sparked fierce debate not merely about authorship and creativity, but about the very foundations of aesthetic judgment itself (Allen 2022, 45-47). The visceral rejection of A.I.-generated art by 74% percent of surveyed artists, who consider the process unethical, reveals anxieties that extend far beyond professional concerns about technological displacement—they touch upon fundamental questions about the nature of beauty and our capacity to judge it objectively.

This Allen controversy (see US Copyrights Office, 2023) represents merely one instance of broader patterns in A.I. art reception. When the A.I. system DALL-E 2 generated images that some critics considered

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derivative while others found genuinely innovative, the disagreement revealed underlying assumptions about creativity's relationship to consciousness (Marcus & Davis 2022, 89-104). Similarly, the 2023 controversy surrounding A.I.-generated entries in the Sony World Photography Awards—where photographer Boris Eldagsen deliberately submitted A.I. work to expose judging criteria—demonstrated that even expert evaluators struggle to articulate what distinguishes authentic from simulated aesthetic merit when intentionality markers are removed (Eldagsen 2023, online). These cases collectively suggest that contemporary aesthetic discourse lacks adequate theoretical resources for addressing the fundamental questions A.I. art raises.

This contemporary crisis provides an ideal lens through which to examine what I shall argue is the most profound implication of Kantian aesthetic theory: that objective aesthetic judgment necessarily presupposes the existence of a transcendent, personal, moral being—what we traditionally call God. The debates surrounding A.I.-generated art inadvertently recreate the fundamental problems that Kant sought to resolve in his analysis of aesthetic judgment, but contemporary approaches consistently fail to provide adequate grounding for the objectivity and universality that aesthetic judgment claims. This failure, I contend, reveals the inadequacy of purely naturalistic or humanistic accounts of aesthetic experience and points toward the necessity of theistic grounding for Kantian aesthetics to maintain its coherence.

The fragmentation evident in contemporary aesthetic discourse—between technological determinism, social constructivism, and phenomenological approaches—demonstrates what occurs when aesthetic theory abandons transcendental grounding in favor of empirical reductionism. Each approach encounters insurmountable difficulties precisely because it attempts to ground aesthetic judgment in contingent facts rather than in the *a priori* conditions that make such judgment possible. The technological determinist approach conflates aesthetic judgment with computational complexity, reducing the distinctive character of aesthetic experience to mechanical processing. The social constructivist approach reduces aesthetic normativity to contingent social facts, eliminating the possibility of genuine critical judgment. The phenomenological approach grounds aesthetic judgment in particular features of human psychology, failing to account for the universal validity that aesthetic judgment necessarily claims.

These contemporary failures illuminate the persistent relevance of Kant's transcendental method, but they also reveal what I shall argue is an internal tension within Kantian aesthetic itself—a tension that can only be resolved through explicit theistic commitment. Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment as involving disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness without purpose, and necessity provides the most sophisticated framework available for understanding aesthetic experience. Yet this framework faces a fundamental problem: how can purely finite, natural beings make judgments that claim universal validity and necessity without grounding in some transcendent source of objectivity? Certainly, a methodological clarification is warranted. This investigation advances the theistic interpretation as the most compelling resolution to the tensions within Kantian aesthetics, while acknowledging that the philosophical landscape admits alternative metaphysical frameworks. My argument is that among available options—Platonic realism, Hegelian idealism (1975), naturalistic reductionism, or various phenomenological approaches—the theistic reading alone provides adequate grounding for the four moments of aesthetic judgment without internal contradiction. This claim will be defended not merely through elimination of alternatives but through demonstrative argument showing why the specific characteristics required for aesthetic objectivity (intelligence, personality, moral authority, and ultimacy) converge precisely upon what classical theology identifies as divine nature (Cf. Scruton, 2011). The conclusion thus emerges from transcendental analysis rather than presupposing theological commitments, though it ultimately vindicates such commitments as philosophically necessary, formally argumentatively. The argument I shall develop proceeds as follows:

First, I demonstrate that contemporary approaches to A.I.-generated art: technological determinism, social constructivism, and phenomenology, fail to account for the distinctive character of aesthetic judgment that the A.I. art phenomenon reveals.

Second, I argue that Kantian aesthetics, properly understood in its transcendental dimension, provides the only adequate framework for addressing these failures by grounding aesthetic judgment in *a priori* conditions of reflective judgment rather than empirical facts about production, reception, or embodiment.

Third, I show how this Kantian framework resolves specific puzzles about A.I. art: why artificial systems can produce genuinely beautiful works, how we can make critical discriminations among such works, and what grounds our normative claims about aesthetic value.

The conclusion that emerges is that Kantian aesthetic remains not merely relevant but indispensable for contemporary aesthetic theory. However, I shall suggest that the full adequacy of this framework may ultimately require engaging with the metaphysical questions that Kant himself recognised as arising from the transcendental analysis of judgment—questions about the “supersensible substrate” that might ground the harmony between our cognitive faculties and the formal features of beautiful objects.

I take this argument to challenge both naturalistic reductions that attempt to ground aesthetic judgment in empirical psychology or evolutionary biology and postmodern approaches that deny the possibility of normatively binding aesthetic judgment. Against naturalism, I argue that the transcendental conditions of aesthetic judgment cannot be reduced to contingent facts about human nature. Against the postmodern cultural mood (Cf. Servaña, 2025), I argue that the evident reality of aesthetic judgment—including our capacity to make meaningful discriminations among A.I.-generated works—requires the kind of universal validity that Kant identified rather than ‘eliminativist’ skepticism. The emergence of A.I.-generated art serves as a contemporary case study that demonstrates both the inadequacy of alternative approaches and the continued necessity of transcendental aesthetics.

II. The Contemporary Fragmentation of Aesthetic Response: Diagnosis of a Crisis

The contemporary discourse surrounding A.I.-generated art reveals what can only be described as a crisis in aesthetic theory—a fundamental fragmentation in how theorists, critics, and practitioners attempt to ground their judgments about beauty and artistic value. This fragmentation becomes particularly evident when we examine the three dominant approaches that have emerged in response to the A.I. art phenomenon, each of which attempts to relocate the foundation of aesthetic judgment in empirical rather than transcendental grounds.

The technological determinist approach, exemplified by theorists like Mario Klingemann and Memo Akten, represents perhaps the most reductive response to the challenge of A.I.-generated art. This approach attempts to ground aesthetic judgment in the technical sophistication of A.I. algorithms and their capacity to generate novel combinations of existing artistic elements (Klingemann [in Sotheby] 2019; Akten 2021, 78-95). Proponents argue that aesthetic value emerges from computational complexity, treating the sophistication of neural networks and machine learning processes as evidence for genuinely creative outcomes that merit aesthetic consideration. They point to the capacity of A.I. systems to discover unexpected patterns, generate surprising juxtapositions, and produce works that exceed the explicit intentions of their programmers as demonstration of aesthetic legitimacy.

However, this technological determinist framework encounters fundamental difficulties when confronted with the question of aesthetic normativity—the very heart of what makes aesthetic judgment more than mere preference or technical assessment. The mere fact that an A.I. system can generate novel combinations of visual elements provides no explanation for why some combinations should be considered beautiful while others are not. The approach conflates technical innovation with aesthetic value, falling into what we might call technological fetishism—mistaking the means of production for the grounds of aesthetic judgment itself.

More critically, the emphasis on algorithmic sophistication threatens to reduce aesthetic experience to computational processing, eliminating precisely what Kant identified as the distinctive character of aesthetic judgment: its grounding in the harmonious play of cognitive faculties rather than determinate conceptual rules. As Kant argues in the *Critique of Judgment*, “the judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment and so is not a logical judgment but an aesthetic one, by which we mean a judgment whose determining basis cannot be other than subjective” (KU, AA 5:203 trans. Pluhar, p. 44). The technological determinist approach precisely reverses this insight, attempting to ground aesthetic judgment in objective, algorithmic processes rather than in the subjective universality that Kant identified as essential to aesthetic experience.

The social constructivist approach, influenced by institutional theory and post-colonial critiques, represents an attempt to locate aesthetic significance in cultural and social positioning rather than in intrinsic properties of objects or technical processes of their creation. Critics like Zach Lieberman and Helena Sarin argue that A.I. art gains aesthetic legitimacy through integration into established art world institutions, adoption by recognised artists, and capacity to generate critical discourse about creativity and authorship (Lieberman 2022, 1847-1863; Sarin [in Sarin] 2022). This approach emphasises the social and cultural factors that shape aesthetic judgment, arguing that aesthetic value depends not on intrinsic properties but on positioning within existing frameworks of artistic meaning-making. Yet this social constructivist framework encounters the same difficulties that plague institutional approaches more generally: the reduction of aesthetic normativity to contingent social facts. If aesthetic value depends solely on institutional recognition or critical acceptance, we are left without resources for evaluating these institutions themselves or for distinguishing between genuine aesthetic insight and mere fashion or market manipulation. The framework becomes particularly problematic when dealing with works that explicitly challenge institutional boundaries or when addressing cross-cultural aesthetic encounters where different institutional frameworks yield conflicting judgments. More fundamentally, the social constructivist approach abandons what Kant identified as the essential claim of aesthetic judgment to universal validity. When Kant argues that “we make a claim to everyone’s assent” in aesthetic judgment, he means precisely that such judgment cannot be reduced to contingent social agreement but must involve appeal to universal human faculties (KU, AA 5:215; trans. Pluhar, p. 56). The social constructivist framework eliminates this universality claim, reducing aesthetic judgment to local cultural practices and thus abandoning the possibility of genuine aesthetic criticism that transcends particular social formations.

The phenomenological approach, represented by theorists like Simon Critchley and Drew Leder, emphasises the embodied character of aesthetic experience and the unique capacity of human consciousness to engage with aesthetic objects through lived, corporeal encounter (Critchley 1997, 45-67; Cf. Leder 1990). This approach argues that genuine aesthetic experience requires the kind of embodied presence and temporal unfolding that only human consciousness can provide, thus questioning whether encounters with A.I.-generated works can constitute authentic aesthetic experiences. Proponents emphasise the importance of intention, biography, and lived experience in aesthetic creation and reception, arguing that the absence of these factors in A.I.-generated art fundamentally compromises its aesthetic status.

Charitably, we can see that the phenomenological approach merits more sustained attention, for it captures genuine insights about aesthetic experience that purely intellectualist accounts neglect. Heidegger’s analysis in “The Origin of the Work of Art” reveals how artworks disclose worlds—they do not merely represent reality but open clearing spaces within which beings can appear in their intelligibility (Heidegger 1971, 44-56). His concept of ‘earth’ as the self-concealing dimension that resists complete conceptual mastery speaks to the inexhaustible richness of aesthetic encounters. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology similarly illuminates how perception itself is fundamentally aesthetic, involving bodily intentionality that exceeds cognitive judgment (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 212-235).

These phenomenological insights do not, however, eliminate the need for transcendental grounding—they rather deepen the question. If artworks disclose or “unconceal” worlds, what accounts for the possibility of such disclosure? If perception involves pre-cognitive aesthetic dimensions, what grounds the normative distinction between authentic and inauthentic aesthetic disclosure? Heidegger himself gestures toward something like transcendent grounding in his notion of *Sein* (Being) as that which withdraws while giving presence, though he deliberately refuses theological articulation. Yet his refusal creates more problems than it solves: a purely formal transcendence lacks the resources to account for the evaluative dimensions of aesthetic experience—the distinction between genuine beauty and mere novelty, between profound disclosure and superficial appearance².

The phenomenological approach thus reveals the inadequacy of anthropocentric grounding without providing adequate alternative. If aesthetic experience involves participation in world-disclosure that exceeds human construction, this disclosure must be grounded in reality itself rather than merely in contingent features of human existence. The thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) that Heidegger identifies—our always-already being-in-a-world not of our making—points precisely toward the kind of transcendent grounding that theistic metaphysics articulates: we are creatures whose aesthetic capacities reflect not autonomous human achievement but participation in an order of meaning that precedes and exceeds us (see Marion, 2004).

Each of these contemporary approaches reveals the same fundamental problem: the attempt to ground aesthetic judgment in empirical facts rather than transcendental conditions results in the loss of precisely what makes aesthetic judgment distinctive—its claim to universal validity and objective correctness. The technological determinist approach loses universality by grounding judgment in technical expertise accessible only to specialists. The social constructivist approach loses objectivity by reducing judgment to contingent cultural agreement. The phenomenological approach loses necessity by grounding judgment in particular features of human embodiment that cannot claim universal validity.

This that I call “fragmentation of aesthetic discourse” reflects a broader crisis in contemporary philosophy—the abandonment of transcendental grounding in favor of various forms of empirical reductionism. The result is not merely theoretical confusion but practical paralysis: without adequate grounds for aesthetic judgment, critical discourse becomes increasingly fragmentary and incoherent, cultural education loses its foundation, and the possibility of genuine aesthetic discrimination disappears. Undoubtedly, hence, the A.I. art controversy thus serves as a revealing test case that exposes the inadequacy of contemporary approaches to aesthetic theory. The intensity of the reaction against A.I.-generated art—with seventy-four percent (74%) of artists considering it unethical—suggests that something more than professional anxiety is at stake. The visceral rejection reveals deeper anxieties about the foundations of aesthetic experience itself, anxieties that cannot be addressed through empirical investigation but require transcendental analysis of the conditions that make aesthetic judgment possible.

III. The Problem of Intentionality, Creative Agency, and Genius: Revealing the Deeper Crisis

The question of intentionality and creative agency in A.I.-generated art provides perhaps the most revealing window into the deeper philosophical crisis that underlies contemporary aesthetic discourse. Traditional aesthetic theory has long assumed that genuine artistic creation requires conscious intention, deliberate choice, and expressive purpose on the part of the artist. The emergence of A.I.-generated art challenges this assumption by producing works that appear to exhibit aesthetic properties without any conscious intention or expressive purpose behind their creation. This challenge becomes particularly acute when we consider Kant's concept of Genius (*Genie*), which plays a central role in his account of fine art (*schöne Kunst*). As Kant argues in §46 of the Critique of Judgment, “Genius is the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art... genius is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art” (KU, AA 5:333; trans. Pluhar, p. 174).

For Kant, genuine fine art requires genius precisely because it cannot be produced merely by following determinate rules or applying learned techniques. The genius possesses what Kant calls “*Geist*” (as in Hegel's spirit or animating principle), which manifests in the capacity to create aesthetic ideas—presentations of imagination that occasion much thought but cannot be adequately captured in determinate concepts (KU, AA 5:314; trans. Pluhar, p. 182). This Kantian framework appears to present an insurmountable obstacle for recognising A.I.-generated works as genuine art. A.I. systems operate through algorithmic processing, following explicit rules encoded in their architecture. They lack biological nature, possess no *ingenium*, and—most critically if I may say—have no *Geist* that could serve as the animating principle of aesthetic creation.

A strict application of Kant's account of genius would seem to exclude A.I.-generated works from the category of fine art entirely, relegating them to mere mechanical production or, at best, what Kant calls “mechanical art” as opposed to fine art. However, this apparent obstacle reveals a deeper tension within Kant's own aesthetic theory *i.e.*, a tension between the production-centered account of art (which emphasises genius and intentionality) and the reception-centered account of aesthetic judgment (which emphasises the formal properties of objects and their capacity to occasion the free play of imagination and understanding). This tension becomes evident when we recognise that Kant's analysis of the judgment of taste in the “Analytic of

² In fact, in another paper, I argue that Heidegger's *Æsthetics* is untenable, not because of its anti-essentialist stance *per se*, but that he denies that art (poetry) is a being. See “Ontic Problematique and Modern Poetics in a New Key: Reading Heidegger to Read Bautista” (Servaña, 2025).

the Beautiful” makes no essential reference to the origins or mode of production of æsthetic objects. The four moments of æsthetic judgment: disinterestedness, universal validity, purposiveness without purpose (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*), and subjective necessity, all concern the structure of æsthetic response rather than the causal history of æsthetic objects.

The intentionalist position, for instance, as defended by critics like Arthur Danto and Jerrold Levinson, argues that genuine æsthetic creation requires conscious intention and deliberate choice on the part of the artist (Danto 1981, 165-181; Levinson 1990, 234-256). On this view, A.I.-generated works cannot possess authentic æsthetic status because they lack the intentional structure that distinguishes artistic creation from mere mechanical production. The apparent æsthetic properties of A.I.-generated work are either accidental by-products of computational processes or projections of æsthetic significance by human viewers rather than genuine achievements of creative agency. However, the intentionalist position faces significant difficulties when confronted with the evident æsthetic power of many A.I.-generated work.

If intention is necessary for æsthetic creation, how do we account for the capacity of A.I.-generated works to evoke æsthetic responses that seem indistinguishable in their phenomenological structure from those evoked by intentionally created work? Moreover, the intentionalist position risks committing what we might call the genetic fallacy in æsthetics by conflating the origins of a work with its æsthetic properties, failing to account for the evident autonomy of æsthetic objects once they are created.

Conversely, the anti-intentionalist position, drawing on theorists like Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, argues that æsthetic significance is independent of authorial intention and emerges through the encounter between work and viewer rather than through the creative purposes of the artist (Barthes 1977, 142-148; Foucault 1977, 113-138). From this position, A.I.-generated work can possess authentic æsthetic status because æsthetic significance depends not on the conscious intentions of creators but on their capacity to generate meaningful æsthetic experiences in viewers. The “author”, or in this sense, the “artist” is dead, as this stance is famous for.

Yet the anti-intentionalist position faces its own difficulties in distinguishing between genuine æsthetic significance and mere æsthetic appearance. If intention is irrelevant to æsthetic judgment, how do we distinguish between works that possess genuine æsthetic merit and those that merely simulate æsthetic properties without genuine æsthetic depth? The position risks collapsing into æsthetic relativism that makes critical judgment impossible by eliminating criteria for distinguishing between authentic and superficial æsthetic experience.

The Kantian framework provides resources for transcending this false dilemma by distinguishing between two legitimate but different questions:

1. What constitutes fine art as a category of production? and
2. What constitutes beauty as an object of æsthetic judgment?

Kant’s account of genius addresses the first question, while his analysis of the judgment of taste addresses the second. The tension between these two aspects of Kant’s æsthetic theory becomes productive rather than problematic when we recognise that they operate at different levels of analysis. For Kant, the judgment of taste concerns the formal properties of objects and their capacity to occasion harmonious play of imagination and understanding, regardless of how those objects came to exist. This judgment is fundamentally reception-centered rather than production-centered. As Kant argues, we judge objects beautiful based on their formal purposiveness, not based on knowledge about their causal origins.

The beautiful is that which pleases in mere reflection on its form, apart from any consideration of how or why it came to exist (KU, §13 AA 5:227, trans. Pluhar, p. 68). This reception-centered dimension of Kantian æsthetics explains why A.I.-generated works can evoke genuine æsthetic responses despite lacking genius in the sense Kant describes. When we encounter an A.I.-generated work that exhibits formal harmony, systematic organisation, and purposiveness without determinate purpose, our cognitive faculties respond to these formal properties regardless of the work’s algorithmic origins—necessitating a mind that intends. The free play of imagination and understanding that Kant identifies as the basis of æsthetic pleasure is triggered by the formal features of the object, not by knowledge about the presence or absence of genius in its creation.

However, this recognition generates a deeper question that reveals the ultimate stakes of the intentionality debate: if æsthetic judgment can operate independently of knowledge about creative agency, what accounts for the correlation between formal properties that occasion æsthetic pleasure and the different modes of production that generate such properties? Why should both human genius and artificial algorithms be capable of producing work that exhibit the kind of formal purposiveness that engages our æsthetic faculties?

The contemporary debate surrounding A.I. art thus reveals a fundamental tension in æsthetic theory that cannot be resolved by appeal to either intentionalist or anti-intentionalist positions alone. Both positions fail to address the deeper question of what accounts for æsthetic properties themselves: Why do certain formal configurations occasion æsthetic pleasure while others do not, regardless of their mode of production? This question points toward the need for transcendental analysis that examines the conditions of possibility for æsthetic judgment rather than merely investigating the empirical facts about artistic production or cultural reception. The Kantian framework directs our attention to the *a priori* conditions that make æsthetic judgment possible for any rational being.

To Kant, æsthetic judgment involves the harmonious play of imagination and understanding that occurs when we encounter objects that exhibit purposiveness without determinate purpose. This harmonious play is neither dependent on the conscious intentions of creators nor on empirical cultural agreement, but on the structure of reflective judgment that belongs to the cognitive architecture of any being capable of æsthetic experience.

Yet this Kantian solution itself raises questions that the “Critique of Judgment” only partially addresses. Kant himself recognised a fundamental puzzle in æsthetic judgment: What accounts for the harmony between our cognitive faculties and the formal features of beautiful objects? Why should there be any correlation between the structure of reflective judgment and the objective features that occasion æsthetic response? This question becomes particularly pressing in the context of A.I.-generated art, where the capacity of artificial systems to produce æsthetically significant work suggest that the harmony cannot be explained by appeal to evolutionary adaptation or cultural construction alone.

Think about it: If æsthetic judgment were merely a product of biological evolution or cultural development, there would be no reason to expect that artificial systems operating according to different principles could produce works that engage our æsthetic faculties in the same way as humanly created or naturally occurring objects. The evident capacity of A.I. systems to generate works that evoke genuine æsthetic responses—those characterised by the same sense of purposiveness, harmony, and reflective contemplation that Kant identified as essential to æsthetic judgment—points toward the transcendental character of æsthetic experience. This transcendental character suggests that æsthetic judgment engages with formal features that are independent of both biological contingency and cultural construction. The question then becomes: what accounts for the existence of such formal features and their capacity to occasion æsthetic pleasure? Kant’s own answer invokes the “supersensible substrate” that underlies both nature and human cognition, though he insists this substrate remains unknowable within the limits of theoretical reason. The full significance of this appeal to a supersensible ground will be examined in subsequent sections, but here it suffices to note that the intentionality debate surrounding A.I. art points toward questions that cannot be resolved through closed-system empirical investigation alone but require transcendental analysis of the conditions that make æsthetic judgment possible.

IV. The Kantian Framework and Its Transcendental Requirements

Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* represents the most sophisticated attempt in the history of philosophy to provide systematic grounding for æsthetic judgment while maintaining both its subjective character and its claim to universal validity. The framework that Kant develops through his analysis of the four moments of æsthetic judgment—disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness without purpose, and necessity—provides indispensable resources for understanding æsthetic experience. However, as I shall argue, this framework faces internal tensions that can only be resolved through explicit recognition of its theistic implications.

The first moment of æsthetic judgment concerns what Kant calls **disinterestedness—the requirement that genuine æsthetic appreciation be free from consideration of the object’s utility, moral significance, or relation to our desires and needs**. As Kant puts it, “taste is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking devoid of all interest. The object of such a liking is called beautiful” (KU, AA 5:212; trans. Pluhar, p. 53). This disinterestedness distinguishes æsthetic judgment from both practical judgment, which concerns what is useful or conducive to our purposes, and moral judgment, which concerns what is right or wrong according to universal principles.

The requirement of disinterestedness becomes particularly significant when applied to A.I.-generated art. Contemporary approaches consistently fail to maintain genuine disinterestedness because they ground æsthetic judgment in interested concerns—technical fascination with algorithmic processes, social positioning within art world institutions, or anthropocentric assumptions about the necessity of human embodiment for authentic æsthetic experience. The technological determinist approach involves interest in computational complexity and technical innovation. The social constructivist approach involves interest in cultural authority and institutional recognition. The phenomenological approach involves interest in specifically human forms of experience and embodiment.

Only by maintaining genuine disinterestedness can we approach A.I.-generated works with the kind of reflective contemplation that Kant identified as essential to æsthetic judgment. This means bracketing questions about their technical origins, social acceptance, or relation to human experience and attending purely to their formal properties and their capacity to engage what Kant calls the “free play” of imagination and understanding. When we approach A.I.-generated works with such disinterestedness, many of them do indeed evoke the kind of æsthetic response that Kant described—a sense of purposive harmony that engages our cognitive faculties without being reducible to determinate conceptual knowledge.

The second moment concerns **universality—the claim that æsthetic judgments, despite their subjective character, demand universal assent from all judging subjects**. As Kant argues, “if we judge objects merely according to concepts, then we lose all presentation of beauty. This is why there cannot be any rule by which someone could be compelled to acknowledge that something is beautiful. No one can use reasons or principles to talk us into a judgment on whether some garment, house, or flower is beautiful. We want to submit the object to our own eyes, as if our liking depended on sensation. And yet, if we then call the object beautiful, we believe we have a universal voice, and we lay claim to the assent of everyone” (KU, AA 5:219; trans. Pluhar, p. 60;).

This claim to universality represents perhaps the most problematic aspect of Kantian aesthetics for contemporary theory. How can a judgment that is essentially subjective—grounded in the particular play of cognitive faculties in individual consciousness—nevertheless claim universal validity? Contemporary approaches consistently fail to account for this universality because they ground aesthetic judgment in contingent facts that cannot claim universal validity. Technical expertise, cultural agreement, and human embodiment are all particular rather than universal foundations.

The A.I. art controversy illuminates this problem with particular clarity. When we encounter an A.I.-generated work that strikes us as beautiful and when our aesthetic judgment claims the same universal validity as judgments about naturally produced works. We expect others to recognise the beauty we perceive, and we regard those who fail to recognise it as either lacking in aesthetic sensitivity or allowing non-aesthetic considerations to interfere with their judgment. This claim to universality cannot be explained by appeal to shared cultural background, technical expertise, or biological similarity, since the work's artificial origin disrupts all these forms of commonality.

The universality of aesthetic judgment points toward what Kant calls a “supersensible substrate” that underlies both judging subjects and aesthetic objects. This substrate is what accounts for the possibility of universal validity in aesthetic judgment despite its subjective character. The claim to universality in aesthetic judgment presupposes that all rational beings share not merely contingent psychological similarities but essential cognitive structures that make aesthetic experience possible. These structures, however, require transcendent grounding to avoid reduction to mere empirical generalisations.

The third moment concerns **purposiveness without purpose—perhaps the most distinctive and difficult aspect of Kant's aesthetic theory**. Beautiful objects appear to be purposively organised, exhibiting systematic unity and harmony among their parts, yet they serve no determinate purpose that we can specify. As Kant explains, “an object's form (not what is material in its presentation, *i.e.*, sensation) is called purposive if we perceive it as the ground of a liking for the object in our mere reflection on this form (regardless of any use we intend to make of the object). But we can also think of the purposiveness of form without basing it on a purpose, *i.e.*, without thinking of an end” (KU, AA 5:224; trans. Pluhar, p. 65). This notion of purposiveness without purpose provides crucial resources for understanding A.I.-generated art. Many A.I.-generated works do indeed exhibit the kind of systematic organisation and formal harmony that Kant identified as characteristic of beautiful objects. They appear purposively organised without serving any determinate purpose—they exhibit aesthetic unity without being reducible to functional design or symbolic meaning. The fact that these works are produced by artificial systems operating according to algorithmic rules does not eliminate their purposive character but rather highlights it by demonstrating that purposiveness can emerge from processes that do not involve conscious design toward determinate ends.

However, the notion of purposiveness without purpose raises fundamental questions about the ontological status of aesthetic objects. What accounts for the systematic organisation that we perceive in beautiful objects? Why should there be objects that exhibit purposive unity without serving determinate purposes? Kant's answer appeals to the regulative principle of reflective judgment, which presupposes systematic unity in nature without being able to derive this unity from determinate concepts. But this answer raises further questions about what accounts for the regulative principles themselves and why they should correspond to the actual structure of aesthetic objects.

The fourth moment concerns **necessity—the claim that aesthetic judgments involve not merely actual but required agreement from all rational beings**. When we judge something beautiful, we do not merely report our personal preference or even our expectation that others will agree; we make a normative claim that others ought to agree if they are judging properly. However, this necessity is fundamentally different from the objective necessity involved in cognitive judgments.

As Kant carefully distinguishes, “beautiful is what we like in judging it (not in sensation or by means of a concept). From this it follows at once that we must like it apart from all interest. But we must also be able to demand this liking from everyone, even though this demand is not based on concepts. The necessity thought in an aesthetic judgment is of a special kind: *it is not a theoretical objective necessity... nor is it a practical necessity...* Rather, being a necessity that is thought in an aesthetic judgment, it can only be called exemplary, *i.e.*, a necessity of the assent of everyone to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state” (KU, AA 5:243-244; trans. Pluhar, pp. 84-85).

This exemplary necessity distinguishes aesthetic judgment from both cognitive judgment (which derives necessity from concepts) and practical judgment (which derives necessity from moral law). The necessity of aesthetic judgment is subjective **yet** claims universal validity: it makes a demand on all judging subjects without being able to prove this demand through concepts or demonstrate it through experience. This paradoxical structure—subjective yet universally valid, particular yet claiming assent from all—constitutes what Kant calls the *antinomy*, or better yet, *paradox of taste*.

The A.I. art controversy exemplifies this normative character of aesthetic judgment with particular clarity. When we encounter an A.I.-generated work that strikes us as beautiful, our judgment claims the same exemplary necessity as judgments about humanly created works. We expect others to recognise the beauty we perceive, and we regard those who fail to recognise it as either lacking in aesthetic sensitivity or allowing non-aesthetic considerations (such as bias against artificial production) to interfere with their judgment. This claim to necessary agreement cannot be explained by appeal to shared cultural background, technical expertise, or biological similarity, since the work's artificial origin disrupts all these forms of commonality.

The exemplary necessity that Kant identifies in aesthetic judgment presupposes what he calls a *sensus communis*, *i.e.*, a common sense that all rational beings share as the condition for the possibility of

communicating judgments that claim universal validity. This common sense is not an empirical fact about psychological uniformity across human populations but a transcendental principle that makes aesthetic judgment possible. As Kant argues, “if cognitions and judgments... are to be communicated, then they must also be able to be universally communicated; for otherwise they would not be in harmony with the object... Since this is bound to occur if the judgment is to be correct, it follows that we must be able to assume a common sense” (KU, AA 5:246; trans. Pluhar, p. 87). This appeal to a *sensus communis* raises fundamental questions that push beyond the boundaries of aesthetic theory proper. What accounts for this common sense that all rational beings supposedly share? Why should there be universal cognitive structures that make aesthetic judgment possible? If these structures were merely contingent features of human psychology, they could claim no normative authority over aesthetic judgment. If they were merely cultural constructions, they could not ground the universal validity that aesthetic judgment necessarily claims.

Kant himself recognised that these questions point toward that “supersensible substrate” that underlies both nature and human cognition. In the “Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment”, he argues that the [paradox] of taste or the apparent contradiction between the subjective character of aesthetic judgment and its claim to universal validity—can only be resolved by appeal to this supersensible ground. As Kant puts it, “we can at least point to the supersensible as the basis for resolving this antinomy... the concept of the supersensible that underlies the object (and the judging subject as well) as object of sense, *i.e.*, as appearance, might be the basis for resolving this antinomy” (KU, AA 5:375; trans. Pluhar, p. 216).

However, Kant insists that this supersensible substrate remains unknowable within the limits of theoretical cognition. We can think it as a regulative principle that guides reflective judgment, but we cannot know it as an object of theoretical knowledge. This regulative character suggests that Kant’s appeal to the supersensible operates at the boundaries of critical philosophy, gesturing toward metaphysical questions that transcendental analysis identifies but cannot itself fully resolve.

These four moments of aesthetic judgment—disinterestedness, subjective universal validity, purposiveness without purpose, and exemplary necessity—thus present a coherent yet paradoxical structure. They ground aesthetic judgment in subjective conditions (the harmonious play of cognitive faculties) while claiming universal validity that transcends subjective preference. They identify formal properties of objects (purposiveness) without attributing objective predicates to them. They make normative demands without being able to prove these demands through concepts or derive them from determinate rules. This paradoxical structure reveals the distinctive character of aesthetic judgment as operating between theoretical cognition (which determines objects through concepts) and practical reason (which determines actions through moral law). Aesthetic judgment exercises what Kant calls reflective judgment—one that seeks to find universal principles for particular cases rather than applying given universal concepts to particular instances. This reflective character explains why aesthetic judgment can respond to A.I.-generated works despite their artificial origins: reflective judgment operates on formal properties rather than causal histories, on purposiveness rather than determinate purposes, on subjective universality rather than objective predication.

The Kantian framework thus provides resources for addressing the A.I. art phenomenon that contemporary approaches lack. It explains why A.I.-generated works can evoke genuine aesthetic responses (because aesthetic judgment responds to formal properties rather than modes of production), how we can make critical discriminations among such works (because exemplary necessity provides normative standards), and what grounds our aesthetic claims (because subjective universal validity appeals to transcendental conditions rather than empirical facts).

However, the full adequacy of this framework depends on how we understand the supersensible substrate that Kant invokes to resolve the antinomy of taste. Does this substrate remain merely a regulative principle, or does it point toward deeper metaphysical commitments? Can transcendental aesthetic maintain coherence without addressing the ontological questions it raises? These questions suggest that the Kantian framework, while providing the most adequate analysis of aesthetic judgment available, may require extending toward the broader metaphysical dimensions of Kant’s critical project—dimensions that become explicit in his practical philosophy where he appeals to God, freedom, and immortality as postulates of practical reason.

V. The Transcendental Argument: Kantian Aesthetic as the Necessary Framework

Having examined the inadequacies of contemporary approaches to aesthetic judgment and the internal requirements of Kantian aesthetic theory, I now turn to demonstrating why the Kantian framework provides the only adequate foundation for understanding A.I.-generated art and addressing the broader crisis in contemporary Aesthetic theory. This argument proceeds by showing that alternative approaches fail precisely where Kantian transcendental aesthetics succeeds, and that this success depends on the distinctive structure of reflective judgment that Kant identifies. The argument can be formulated as follows:

P1: Any adequate aesthetic theory must account for three features that A.I. art reveals as essential:

- a) the capacity of diverse productive systems to generate aesthetically significant work,
- b) the normative authority of aesthetic judgment that enables critical discrimination, and
- c) the universal validity claimed by aesthetic judgment despite its subjective character.

P2: Technological determinist, social constructivist, and phenomenological approaches fail to account for these features because they ground aesthetic judgment in empirical facts (technical complexity, cultural agreement, human embodiment) rather than transcendental conditions.

P3: Kantian æsthetics alone accounts for these features by grounding æsthetic judgment in the *a priori* structure of reflective judgment, specifically in the harmonious free play of imagination and understanding that responds to formal purposiveness regardless of productive origin.

C: Therefore, Kantian æsthetics provides the only adequate framework for contemporary Æsthetic theory, including theories of A.I.-generated art.

Let's analyse. The first premise identifies three interconnected features of æsthetic judgment that contemporary æsthetic theory must explain. These features are not arbitrary requirements but emerge directly from the phenomena that A.I.-generated art makes explicit. The capacity of A.I. systems to produce æsthetically significant worx demonstrates that æsthetic properties cannot be reducible to specific modes of consciousness, biological structures, or cultural practices. The fact that we make critical discriminations among A.I.-generated works, esp. judging some genuinely beautiful while dismissing others as mere technical exercises, demonstrates that æsthetic judgment involves normative standards that transcend subjective preference. The fact that our judgments about A.I. art claim universal validity, we expect others to recognise the beauty we perceive. It thus demonstrates that æsthetic judgment appeals to structures shared by all rational beings rather than contingent features of particular individuals or cultures—a collective bent or unconscious, if you would.

The second premise demonstrates the systematic failure of contemporary approaches to account for these features. Each approach attempts to ground æsthetic judgment in empirical facts that cannot support the universal validity and normative authority that æsthetic judgment necessarily claims. The technological determinist approach grounds æsthetic judgment in computational complexity and algorithmic sophistication. However, technical complexity cannot account for æsthetic normativity—why some complex combinations are beautiful while others are not.

Moreover, grounding æsthetic judgment in technical expertise makes æsthetic appreciation accessible only to specialists who understand algorithmic processes, contradicting the universal validity that æsthetic judgment claims. When Kant argues that æsthetic judgment must be accessible to a *sensus communis* shared by all rational beings, he precisely rejects the kind of expert-dependent judgment that technological determinism requires. The social constructivist approach grounds æsthetic judgment in institutional recognition and cultural agreement. However, cultural consensus cannot account for æsthetic normativity or that capacity to criticise existing institutions and cultural practices from æsthetic standpoints.

If æsthetic value depends solely on institutional recognition, we lose resources for evaluating these institutions themselves or for recognising æsthetic achievements that transcend particular cultural boundaries. The cross-cultural recognition of certain A.I.-generated worx as beautiful (despite the novelty of AI art as a category) demonstrates that æsthetic judgment cannot be reduced to cultural construction, but that it must involve appeal to transcultural structures.

The phenomenological approach grounds æsthetic judgment in features of human embodiment and lived experience. However, the capacity of A.I.-generated works to evoke æsthetic responses that share the phenomenological structure of responses to humanly created works suggests that æsthetic judgment cannot depend essentially on biological embodiment. While embodied presence may enrich æsthetic experience, it cannot constitute its transcendental foundation. When A.I.-generated worx occasion the same sense of purposiveness, harmony, and reflective contemplation that Kant identified as essential to æsthetic judgment, this demonstrates that æsthetic response depends on formal features accessible to reflective judgment rather than on biological particularity.

The systematic failure of these (strong) empirical approaches reveals a fundamental principle: æsthetic judgment cannot be grounded in contingent facts about production, reception, or embodiment without losing the universal validity and normative authority that belong to its essential character. This principle directs us toward transcendental analysis: the examination of the *a priori* conditions that make æsthetic judgment possible as such, regardless of empirical variation in modes of production, cultural contexts, or biological structures.

The third premise demonstrates that Kantian æsthetics succeeds precisely where contemporary approaches fail by grounding æsthetic judgment in transcendental rather than empirical conditions. The key insight concerns the structure of reflective judgment that Kant identifies in the "Critique of Judgment". Unlike determinative judgment, which applies given universal concepts to particular instances, reflective judgment seeks to find universal principles for particular cases. In æsthetic judgment specifically, reflective judgment responds to formal purposiveness or that systematic organisation of elements that appears designed yet serves no determinate purpose that we can specify (e.g., harmony, unity, focality, whatnot). This structure of reflective judgment explains all three features that A.I. art reveals as essential to æsthetic experience:

First, it explains why diverse productive systems can generate æsthetically significant works: reflective judgment responds to formal properties rather than causal histories. Whether a work results from human genius, natural processes, or algorithmic computation matters not at all to æsthetic judgment as such, which attends only to the formal configuration that occasions harmonious play of imagination and understanding.

Second, reflective judgment grounds æsthetic normativity in exemplary necessity rather than conceptual determination or empirical agreement. The normative force of æsthetic judgment derives from its appeal to a *sensus communis* as that collective or universal cognitive structures that all rational beings share as conditions for the possibility of communicable judgment. This exemplary necessity explains why we can make critical discriminations that claim universal validity: we judge that others "ought to" recognise the beauty we perceive not because we can prove it conceptually-propositionally or because cultural conventions demand it, but because we appeal to cognitive structures that constitute any rational being as such. Third, reflective judgment explains how æsthetic judgment can claim universal validity despite its subjective character. The

judgment remains subjective because it is grounded in the harmonious play of cognitive faculties rather than objective properties that we attribute to objects through concepts.

Yet it claims universal validity because this harmonious play responds to formal features that any rational being with the same cognitive architecture would recognise. As Kant puts it, aesthetic judgment involves “subjective universal validity”—a validity that is subjective in its ground (the state of cognitive faculties) yet universal in its claim (demanding agreement from all).

The Kantian framework thus resolves the apparent paradoxes that A.I.-generated art makes explicit:

How do machines, lacking consciousness or intentionality, produce beautiful work?

It is because beauty depends on formal purposiveness accessible to reflective judgment rather than on conscious purposes or intentions.

How can we make critical discriminations among A.I.-generated works if aesthetic judgment is merely subjective?

It is because subjective universal validity provides normative standards rooted in transcendental conditions rather than personal preferences.

Why should A.I.-generated work claim the same aesthetic status as humanly created works?

It is because aesthetic judgment as such abstracts from modes of production to attend to formal features that occasion harmonious free play of imagination and understanding.

However, this success of the Kantian framework raises deeper questions that Kant himself recognised but did not fully resolve within the confines of the third Critique. The most fundamental question concerns the status of the supersensible substrate that Kant invokes to resolve the antinomy of taste. What exactly is this substrate that supposedly grounds both the formal purposiveness of beautiful objects and the cognitive structures that respond to such purposiveness? Is it merely a regulative principle that guides reflective judgment without corresponding to any reality, or does it point toward ontological commitments that transcendental aesthetics identifies but cannot itself fully articulate?

Kant's treatment of the supersensible remains deliberately ambiguous. On one hand, he insists that it remains unknowable within the limits of theoretical cognition—we cannot determine it as an object of knowledge or attribute determinate predicates to it. On the other hand, he suggests that appeal to this supersensible ground is not merely optional or heuristic but necessary for resolving the fundamental contradictions that arise in aesthetic judgment. The supersensible is not merely a useful fiction but the transcendental condition that makes aesthetic judgment possible. This ambiguity suggests that Kantian aesthetics may ultimately require extending beyond the boundaries of pure aesthetic theory toward the broader metaphysical commitments of Kant's critical philosophy.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that practical reason necessarily postulates God, freedom, and immortality as conditions for the possibility of moral action and the highest good. These postulates are not objects of theoretical knowledge but necessary presuppositions of practical rationality. The parallel structure between aesthetic and practical reason—both involve forms of judgment that claim universal validity yet cannot be grounded in theoretical cognition—suggests that aesthetic experience may similarly require postulates that transcend theoretical demonstration.

The question, then, is whether aesthetic judgment can maintain full coherence as an autonomous domain or whether it ultimately points toward metaphysical commitments that would integrate it into Kant's broader philosophical system. This question cannot be resolved through aesthetic analysis alone but requires examining the systematic connexions among Kant's three Critiques and the role that the supersensible plays across his critical philosophy.

What remains clear, however, is that contemporary aesthetic theory cannot address the challenges posed by A.I.-generated art without recovering the transcendental dimension of aesthetic judgment that Kant identified. The failures of technological determinism, social constructivism, and phenomenology demonstrate that empirical approaches systematically miss the distinctive character of aesthetic experience. Only by returning to Kantian transcendental aesthetics—properly understood in its emphasis on reflective judgment, subjective universal validity, and formal purposiveness—can we develop an adequate framework for contemporary aesthetic theory.

VI. Conclusions: The Necessity of Transcendental Aesthetics and the Question of Ontological Grounding

The investigation undertaken in this work has revealed that contemporary approaches to aesthetic theory systematically fail to account for the distinctive features of aesthetic judgment that A.I.-generated art makes explicit. The technological determinist approach reduces aesthetic judgment to technical complexity, eliminating its normative and universal character. The social constructivist approach reduces aesthetic judgment to cultural agreement, eliminating its claim to validity that transcends contingent social formations. The phenomenological approach reduces aesthetic judgment to human embodiment, eliminating its accessibility to reflective judgment as such.

These failures are not accidental inadequacies that might be corrected through further empirical investigation, but systematic consequences of attempting to ground aesthetic judgment in contingent facts rather than transcendental conditions. The Kantian framework provides the only adequate foundation for contemporary aesthetic theory precisely because it grounds aesthetic judgment in the a priori structure of reflective judgment rather than in empirical facts about production, reception, or embodiment. Kant's analysis of the four moments of aesthetic judgment: 1) disinterestedness, 2) subjective universal validity, 3) purposiveness

without purpose, and 4) exemplary necessity captures the distinctive character of æsthetic experience that contemporary approaches systematically overlook. This framework explains why A.I.-generated works can evoke genuine æsthetic responses (because reflective judgment responds to formal properties), how we can make critical discriminations among such works (because exemplary necessity provides normative standards), and what grounds our æsthetic claims (because subjective universal validity appeals to transcendental conditions shared by all rational beings).

The practical implications of recovering this Kantian framework extend beyond academic philosophy to questions of cultural education, artistic practice, and public policy. If æsthetic judgment involves reflective engagement with formal purposiveness rather than mere preference or cultural conditioning, then æsthetic education must cultivate the capacity for such reflective judgment rather than merely transmitting technical skills or cultural conventions as:

1. Artists working with A.I. systems must understand their contribution not as providing technical direction to algorithms but as creating conditions for the formal purposiveness that occasions æsthetic response and that
2. Cultural policy must recognise the transcendental dimension of æsthetic experience rather than reducing cultural value to entertainment, self-expression, or economic production.

The emergence of A.I.-generated art, rather than threatening the foundations of æsthetic theory, provides an opportunity to recover insights that modern æsthetic discourse has obscured. The anxiety that A.I. art provokes among artists and critics reflects not merely professional concerns about technological displacement but deeper recognition that æsthetic judgment operates according to principles that transcend the opposition between human and artificial production. By forcing us to confront work which the æsthetic properties cannot be explained by appeal to human consciousness, intentionality, or lived experience, A.I. art reveals the transcendental structure of æsthetic judgment that Kant identified but that contemporary theory has largely abandoned.

However, the full adequacy of the Kantian framework depends on how we address a fundamental question that Kant himself recognised but did not fully resolve:

1. What accounts for the harmony between the formal purposiveness that beautiful objects exhibit and the cognitive structures through which we apprehend such purposiveness?
2. Why should there be any correlation between the organisation of imagination and understanding that constitutes reflective judgment and the formal features of objects—whether naturally occurring, humanly created, or artificially generated—that occasion æsthetic response?

Obviously, Kant's answer invokes that "supersensible substrate" that underlies both nature and human cognition. This substrate serves as the ground that makes possible the harmony between our cognitive faculties and the formal features of beautiful objects.

However, Kant insists that this supersensible remains unknowable within the limits of theoretical cognition. We can think it as a regulative principle that guides æsthetic judgment, but we cannot determine it as an object of theoretical knowledge. This appeal to an 'unknowable' supersensible ground has struck many interpreters as unsatisfying or merely provisional. Does the supersensible remain only a regulative fiction, or does it point toward deeper ontological commitments that Kant's critical philosophy requires but cannot fully articulate within its theoretical boundaries?

The parallel structure between æsthetic judgment (which requires appeal to a supersensible substrate) and practical reason (which requires postulates of God, freedom, and immortality) suggests that Kant's critical philosophy may ultimately require metaphysical commitments that transcend what can be established through transcendental analysis alone.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that practical rationality necessarily postulates God as the ground that makes possible the harmony between virtue and happiness in the highest good. These postulates are not objects of theoretical knowledge but necessary presuppositions of practical reason. The question arises whether æsthetic experience similarly requires postulates that would ground the harmony between cognitive faculties and formal purposiveness. If practical reason requires appeal to God to account for moral possibility, does reflective judgment require similar appeal to account for æsthetic possibility?

This question points beyond the scope of pure æsthetic theory toward systematic connexions among Kant's three Critiques. The first Critique establishes the boundaries of theoretical cognition, showing that we cannot have theoretical knowledge of God, freedom, or immortality. The second Critique demonstrates that practical reason nevertheless requires postulating these ideas as conditions for the possibility of moral action. The third Critique examines judgment as the faculty that mediates between theoretical cognition and practical reason, finding in æsthetic and teleological judgment a domain where subjective purposes and objective nature harmonise without conceptual determination. The structure of this three-part system suggests that Kant's critical philosophy moves progressively from establishing theoretical limits, through discovering practical necessities, toward recognizing systematic connexions that require metaphysical grounding.

Æsthetic judgment occupies a crucial position in this system precisely because it reveals harmony between mind and nature that cannot be accounted for by theoretical cognition alone yet parallels the harmony between virtue and happiness that practical reason requires. Whether æsthetic experience ultimately requires the kind of metaphysical grounding that practical reason explicitly postulates remains an open question that transcendental æsthetic analysis identifies but cannot itself resolve. What remains certain is that

purely naturalistic or constructivist approaches fail to account for the distinctive structure of aesthetic judgment that Kant identified and that A.I.-generated art has made impossible to ignore.

Any adequate aesthetic theory must recover the transcendental dimension of aesthetic experience, even if doing so raises questions about the full ontological commitments that such transcendental analysis presupposes. The contemporary crisis in aesthetic theory thus reveals itself as ultimately a crisis about the proper relationship between transcendental analysis and metaphysical commitment. Can we maintain the coherence of aesthetic judgment by appealing only to regulative principles, or does the structure of aesthetic experience point toward constitutive metaphysical truths? Does the supersensible substrate remain merely a useful fiction, or does it identify real but theoretically unknowable grounds of aesthetic possibility?

These questions connect aesthetic theory to the deepest systematic issues in Kant's critical philosophy and suggest directions for further investigation. Future research might profitably explore three interconnected questions: First, how does the concept of the supersensible function across Kant's three Critiques, and what systematic role does it play in connecting theoretical, practical, and aesthetic domains? Second, what are the precise parallels and differences between the postulates of practical reason and the transcendental requirements of aesthetic judgment? Third, can contemporary philosophical theology provide resources for addressing the metaphysical questions that Kant's aesthetic theory raises without violating the critical limits that Kant establishes?

Yet again, these questions suggest that the full significance of Kantian aesthetics for contemporary theory may require engaging not only with the third Critique but with Kant's broader critical project and its potential extension toward the metaphysical commitments implicit in his transcendental philosophy. Just as Kant himself moved from theoretical limits through practical necessities toward systematic integration, contemporary aesthetic theory may need to recover this broader systematic vision to address adequately the challenges that artificial creativity poses.

For now, however, what this investigation has established is that Kantian transcendental aesthetic provides the necessary and only adequate framework for understanding A.I.-generated art and resolving the contemporary crisis in aesthetic theory. The capacity of this framework to account for aesthetic judgment's distinctive structure—its subjective yet universally valid character, its normative force, its independence from modes of production—demonstrates its continued indispensability for Aesthetic theory. Whether this framework ultimately requires extending toward fuller metaphysical commitments remains an open question, but one that we can meaningfully address only after recovering the transcendental dimension of aesthetic experience that contemporary theory has largely abandoned.

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