

**Major Philosophers 460A 2013**  
**Prof. A. Laywine**

The major philosopher under study this term will be Kant. We will be reading his *Critique of Judgement* (1790). This book divides into two parts: a critique of aesthetic judgement and a critique of teleological judgement. Our focus will be on the *latter*, i.e., teleological judgement, though we will have occasion to look at the former too.

The critique of teleological judgement is concerned with natural teleology, i.e., with the conditions under which we may reasonably judge that something should count as an end or purpose of nature. There is no great difficulty in specifying the conditions under which we may reasonably judge that something is an end or purpose of human agency. Such an end will be the final cause that moves a person to undertake a certain action. I will never spontaneously start collecting yellow jelly-beans. If I do so at all, it will be for a certain reason. That reason could be just that I believe this will please you, if – say – I happen to know that you like jelly-beans a lot and that yellow is your all time favourite. Pleasing you in this way may thus be the final cause, end or purpose of my yellow jelly-bean collecting. You may reasonably judge that it is the end of my yellow jelly-bean collecting if I tell you as much or if you have grounds for making the inference. But, for Kant at least, it is a serious problem specifying the conditions under which we may reasonably judge that nature has ends. For one thing, Kant does not regard nature as having agency in the way that we do. For another thing, he was committed to saying in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that, as finite rational beings, we can hope to have knowledge only of objects of experience and, then again, only insofar as we conceive of them as subject to natural laws. He took such laws to be ‘mechanical’, i.e., as governing the motion and forces of material things. To the extent that nature is subject to laws of this kind, there is no room for ends or purposes of nature. Nature is not trying to achieve anything in particular by conforming to the Newtonian law of universal attraction: planets, comets, whole galaxies move in distinctive ways due to this law, but they do so ‘blindly’, without any set purpose of their own. One option for Kant, given his commitment to this ‘blind’ mechanism of nature, would have been to jettison natural teleology all together. But he was willing to do that no more than he was willing to jettison human freedom. One very simple reason for this is that, unlike Descartes and Spinoza, he always doubted that the physiology of living organisms could ever be explained solely by ‘mechanical laws’. But then he had to address a very serious, urgent question: how can it ever be reasonable to judge that something is an end of nature? This is the question he sets out to answer in the second half of the *Critique of Judgement*. Our task this term will be to make sense of his answer and to evaluate it philosophically.

I am not presupposing that students enrolled in this course will have taken some other course in particular. To that extent, there are no prerequisites: I am not presupposing that you have already taken a ‘Kant course’. I am presupposing, however, that, if you have never read anything by Kant before, you will be willing to do some serious independent reading parallel to the class, e.g., from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. (We can and will talk about what these parallel readings should ideally include.) Please note too: this will not be a course on Kant on taste, aesthetics or eighteenth-century aesthetics. We will no doubt have occasion to talk about such things. But please do not sign up for this course with the expectation that we will be spending significant time on them. In truth, this course will be largely concerned with metaphysics, epistemology and the philosophy of science.

I have ordered copies of the Cambridge University Press translation of the third *Critique* (as it is sometimes called) at the Word Bookstore on Milton. (I am told they have already arrived!) Do note that, for reasons of little or no interest to us, the CUP translator decided to translate the title as the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (just so you know what to ask for).