

## KANT ON THE NATURE OF AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

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In the analytic of beautiful which is the first part of the *CJ*, Kant mentions two distinct groups of criteria to mark aesthetic judgement from other kinds of judgement – logical and moral. Universality and necessity are defining criteria for an aesthetic judgement, disinterestedness and the form of finality are justificatory criteria. Kant presents this in terms of the four moments of an aesthetic judgement – quality, quantity, relation and modality.

Kant's view on the nature of aesthetic judgement is propounded in the *Critique of Judgement*.<sup>1</sup> An aesthetic judgement is a judgement that a given object is beautiful. Such a judgement Kant calls a judgement of taste which is brought under the class of judgements, called reflective judgement. To understand Kant's view, we have to ask what Kant understands by judgement. Judgement is a higher cognitive faculty according to Kant. The notion of judgement runs through the first, second and third *Critiques*. In each *Critique* there is an appeal to our faculty of judgement and the existence of an a priori principle of judgement. But what Kant means by judgement in the first *Critique* (1772) is different from what he understands by it when he comes to write the *Critique of Judgement* (hence forth *CJ*) in 1790. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (hence forth *CPR*) to think is to judge; to judge is to subsume particulars under a concept. A concept is a rule or principle of systematization. As for example, when we say “this plate is circular”, a particular, namely, this plate, is subsumed under the concept of circularity.

Kant rethinks about this conception of judgement in the third *Critique*.<sup>2</sup> He wishes to call the kind of judgement “determinative” judgement, and he seeks to distinguish it from “reflective” judgement. The former, that is, a “determinative” judgement is simply a matter of subsumption – subsuming particulars under concepts given by understanding, understanding being the faculty of concepts. In a reflective judgement a particular is given but the rule or principle under which it falls has to be found or discovered. Let us try to understand Kant's distinction between

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<sup>1</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgement*. Translated by James Cread Meredith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, New work, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Wicks, Robert. *Kant on Judgment*, Routledge, 2007, p.10

“determinative” and “reflective” judgement. In the introduction to the *Critique of Judgement* Kant writes, “If the universal (the rule, principle, or law,) is given, then the judgement which subsumes the particular under it *is determinant*”.<sup>3</sup> It makes determinant a basic concept by means of a given empirical representation. For a determinant judgement the law is given, a-priori. On the same page of *CJ* Kant says that a determinant judgement “has no need to devise a law for its own guidance to enable it to subordinate the particular in nature to the universal”.<sup>4</sup>

There is, however, a second possible relation between particulars and universals. This relation obtains when a particular is given, but the universal is to be found. A reflective judgement is a product of the capacity to respond to the situation defined by this relation. Hence, Kant defines a reflective judgement as a capacity for reflecting on a given representation according to a certain principle, to produce a possible concept.<sup>5</sup> A reflective judgement has the task of finding an appropriate universal for a given particular. This is the peculiarity of a reflective judgement.

A reflective judgement is linked to reflection. Kant uses “reflection” in two senses. He says that to reflect is to compare and combine a given representation 1) either with other representations or 2) with one’s own cognitive faculties<sup>6</sup>, with respect to a concept thereby found possible. This shows that from these two conceptions of reflection arise two senses of reflective judgement. In one sense, a reflective judgement may be concerned with certain relations among objects. In another sense, a reflective judgement may be concerned with certain relations between an object and a subject of cognition. That means, there are relations of comparison and combination of a given representation with one’s own cognitive faculties – relations which are not represented by any concept at all. In such a judgement, in the subject’s estimation of an object, no concepts are employed. What the judgement involves instead is a harmony of the cognitive faculties of imagination

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<sup>3</sup> *CJ*, trans. James Creed Meredith, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p.18

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Burnham, Douglas. *Kant’s Philosophies of Judgement*, Edinburgh University Press, 2004, p.149

<sup>6</sup> Wicks, Robert. *Kant on Judgment*, Routledge, 2007, p.38

and understanding. That is to say, the response to the object is a harmony of these faculties.

A judgement of taste or aesthetic judgement is treated by Kant as a species of reflective judgement in this second sense. He says that in an aesthetic judgement we deal with a “judgement in its reflection”. An aesthetic judgement is judging an object as beautiful. Judging an object as beautiful does not mean predicated an objectively valid concept, namely, the concept of beauty to it or attributing to it properties of empirical objects, for example, pleasing, agreeable, satisfying, etc. There is no hedonic appeal. There is, according to Kant, a unification or synthesis of manifold of intuitions in imagination. In this combination of the manifold, imagination is brought into accord or in harmony with understanding. This expression “harmony with understanding” means that the imaginative grasp of unity meets understanding’s general requirement of lawfulness, though understanding does not supply any law or concept for the arrangement of the manifold by imagination. Kant’s account of harmony of faculties does not assign any active role to understanding, its customary role of applying a concept to a manifold as rule of its unification. Imagination, as it were, does the function of understanding by holding together the manifold as unity before the mind, but without the use of a concept or a rule. That is to say, the judgement “X’ is beautiful” describes a state of affairs in which imagination accomplishes everything that is accomplished by understanding, but without the use of a concept. Kant explains this with an example. He speaks of the experience of listening to music. Listening to music produces a feeling of unity and wholeness in a manifold of impressions. The enjoyment of music is produced by the mind’s grasping of this unity but without the use of a concept or a rule. That is why the relationship between imagination and understanding in the context of a reflective judgement of taste is called by Kant “free play”<sup>7</sup> of imagination and understanding without the compulsion of any concept.

In the ‘Analytic of Beautiful’ which is the first part of *Critique of Judgement*, Kant mentions two distinct groups of criteria to distinguish aesthetic judgement from other kinds of judgements - logical and moral. Universality and necessity are defining

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<sup>7</sup> Wicks, Robert. *Kant on Judgment*, Routledge, 2007, p.44

criteria for an aesthetic judgement and disinterestedness and form of finality are justificatory criteria. Kant presents this in terms of the four logical aspects or moments (*Momente*)<sup>8</sup> of aesthetic judgement. But it is difficult to say what Kant means by “moment”. There is no explanation in any of the commentaries. However, these are quality, quantity, relation and modality. From the moment of quantity aesthetic judgements are characterized as ‘subjectively universal’. Laws of nature are universal. Moral laws are universalizable. Aesthetic judgements are subjectively universal. Universality is the basic epistemological condition for calling an object beautiful. When I call something beautiful, I do not merely say that it pleases me; rather it ought to please everyone perceiving. If my use of predicate ‘beautiful’ is not to be irrational, I must have some reason for demanding a similar delight from everyone. The claim to universality of aesthetic judgement is supported by the difference between judgements about the ‘agreeable’ and those of the ‘beautiful’. The term ‘agreeable’ functions to report the occurrence of feeling of pleasure in a specific person, perhaps even on a specific occasion e.g., the colour or scent of roses, the finery of fabrics, etc. It does not involve claims on the agreement of others. This claim to inter subjective validity is a condition of the meaningful use of ‘beautiful’. So the expression “beautiful to me” is not permissible. Without universality there would not be such a thing as taste. Taste for Kant in the *CJ* does not mean refinement or cultured habits but stands for what is universally communicable. Taste is the extension of the feeling of pleasure to others on the a priori assumption that what appears to my rational feeling as beautiful will occasion the same judgement in others with rational feeling like me.

Let us now come to the requirement of necessity. Universality and necessity always go together. In an aesthetic judgement the felling of delight in a beautiful object is said to have a necessary relation with the object.<sup>9</sup> This necessity Kant calls exemplary necessity. The necessity of an aesthetic judgement “... can only be called *exemplary*”<sup>10</sup> i.e, it is the necessity of the assent of everyone to a judgement that is

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.16

<sup>9</sup> *CJ*, trans. James Creed Meredith, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p.53

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.81

regarded as an example of a rule that we are unable to state<sup>11</sup>. To make something *exemplary* is to see in the particular what is not valid for the individual alone. That means that the given pleasure in an aesthetic object is connected with a necessary feature of the subject rather than with a contingent feature.

From the moment of modality aesthetic judgements are required to be necessary. A beautiful object has a necessary relationship to delight.<sup>12</sup> This requirement of necessity is not unrelated to the requirement of universality. For the demand of universal validity can be satisfied only by a pleasure which is connected with a necessary rather than a contingent feature of the subject. This necessary feature is the harmony of faculties which is the same for all.

The justificatory criteria are those of disinterestedness and finality of form, from the first and the third moments, i.e., quality and relation respectively. A judgement of the beautiful occasions a delight which is disinterested, that is, the object is judged as beautiful apart from any interest or desire. Interest here means interest in the real existence of an object – as if beauty were the quality of an object, as if we could know and verify this. Interest also means the object becomes desired in some way. A reflective judgement is free from my desire, interest, likes and dislikes. By ‘free’<sup>13</sup> Kant means that the ground of my judgement is free from various inclinations which are exterior to the beautiful object itself, called ‘pure beauty’. When we say “this rose is beautiful”, or “this statue is beautiful”, the delight is disinterested because it is not hinged to the object. For what is the rose as flower after all? It, as Kant says, is the ‘genital’ of the plant. That may be of interest to a botanist but aesthetic delight is different to real existence of objects, whether it is agreeable, useful or good. And in that sense, it is ‘free-floating’. Terms such as “rose” or “statue” identify the object of judgement but cannot ground the inference to their beauty. There are some roses and many statues which are not beautiful.

Kant then turns to the moment of relation. Relation here concerns a relation between the judgement and its object. This particular moment in Kant’s argument is complex. And I shall try my best to explain it. The correct object of an aesthetic

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.81

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p56

<sup>13</sup> Wicks, Robert. *Kant on Judgment*, Routledge, 2007, p.61

delight is purposiveness without the consciousness of any purpose or actual end. From the fact that delight in a beautiful object is disinterested and without a concept. Kant concludes that it has no relation to any subjective end, that is, its success in fulfilling the subject's intention or some objective end. The aesthetic response to a beautiful object is in terms of its form alone. The object has only a "finality of form". In the *CJ* Kant says, "In painting, sculpture, and in fact in all the formative arts, in architecture and horticulture..., the *design* is what is essential. Here it is not what gratifies in sensation but merely what pleases by its form that is the fundamental prerequisite for taste".<sup>14</sup> That means in a reflective judgement of taste the object is responded to by virtue of its form alone. An object has the finality of form when it stands in a certain relation to the subject who perceives and enjoys it. The relation consists in the object's suitability to produce harmony of faculties – imagination and understanding. Such a tendency on the part of the object is finality of form or purposiveness because the harmony of faculties is our general cognitive purpose which is pleasing.

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<sup>14</sup> *CJ*, trans. James Creed Meredith, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p.67