

## CHAPTER IV

### Kant's Theory of Taste

We have seen that Kant describes "reflective judgment" which includes the aesthetic judgment as a species, as judgment of a particular in search of a universal concept or rule, and that he describes "determinant judgment" as that in which the universal is given and under which a particular is subsumed. Practical judgment, comprising utilitarian, prudential and ethical judgment, is determinate, that is we are in possession of a determinate concept concerning what is useful, prudential, or utilitarian, and we bring the concept to bear upon the particular situation. Even ethical choice presupposes a determinate rule : the Categorical Imperative. Briefly, the determinate rule of ethics requires each person to legislate his own moral maxim for all members of the moral community.

Cognitive judgment also presupposes determinate purposes, discoverable by empirical inspection or by rational analysis, as in chemistry or mathematics. But aesthetic judgment does not need a notion of what the object must be, or of its perfection, to feel disinterested pleasure. One can take aesthetic delight in some objects without knowing purely scientific things about them. "Hardly any one but a botanist knows the true nature of a flower, and even he, while recognizing in the

flower the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end when using his taste to judge of its beauty"<sup>1</sup>.

Let us then look for Kant's definition of taste. He defined it as "the faculty to choose in agreement with others, that which sensitively pleases"<sup>2</sup>, and maintained that when one calls an object beautiful, "one declare [s\_] not merely [one's\_] own pleasure, but also that it should please others"<sup>3</sup>. Kant held judgments of taste as "generally valid"<sup>4</sup>. The Critique of Judgment defines the beautiful as "that which, apart from a concept pleases universally"<sup>5</sup>, and taste itself as "the faculty of estimating what makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable without the mediation of a concept"<sup>6</sup>. So to justify any talk of taste at all Kant has to demonstrate its universal validity; and to do this, he has to solve two problems : (a) that of explaining the pleasure of aesthetic response without assimilating it to any simple operation of sense or intellect, and (b) that of supporting the claims of taste without appealing to metaphysics.

Kant has offered a solution of the problem of taste in somewhat the following lines. The judgment of taste, i.e. the assertion that a particular object is beautiful - is an outcome of a complex mental process. It involves, in barest outline of

course, an exercise of reflective judgment in the estimation of an object. In this no concepts are involved, but the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding are nevertheless involved. It leads to a response to that object, a special state of mind, which may be thought of as a harmony or free play of these cognitive faculties. This subjective state manifests its existence by the occurrence of a feeling of pleasure - the pleasure in the beautiful, or aesthetic response itself.

What is the source of the given pleasure? That the pleasure felt in the presence of a particular object is in fact due to the harmony of reason requires an empirical judgment, about its origin. This judgment is reached by reflection on the context and history of one's own mental state, and thus by an exercise of the faculty of judgment. Now this is distinct from that which first produced the felt pleasure in the object. And it is on the basis of the reflection on one's pleasure that a claim of taste is made. The attribution of a particular feeling of pleasure to the harmony of reason licenses the attribution of the pleasure to other persons. This is precisely a claim of intersubjective validity for the pleasure. And the extension of pleasure to others transforms the judgment of taste into a kind of a priori judgment. It rests on an assumption of similarity between oneself and others, and it goes beyond any past experience of agreement. The assumption is only a universal imputation, by

means of a judgment of taste, of a pleasure so produced. The requirement of intersubjective validity set by Kant's definitions of the concepts of beauty and taste imposes criteria for the evaluation of aesthetic response. Any feeling of pleasure, if it is to serve as a ground for calling its object beautiful must be regarded as universally and necessarily valid for any audience of the object. The explanation of aesthetic response as a harmony of reason, Kant supposes, makes it rational to base a public claim to validity on something so subjective as a feeling of pleasure. Kant uses this explanation also, for deriving the criterion of disinterestedness by means of which claims of universality and necessity for given pleasures may actually be justified.

Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment comprises both an analysis of the demands made by judgments of taste and an explanation of the nature of aesthetic response as to how such demands may be met. Underlying this theory is a complex model of mind. It enables Kant to avoid assimilating aesthetic response to either sensory gratification (as the empiricists did) or the intellectual recognition of value (as the rationalists did), and yet to anchor the intersubjective validity of claims of taste on the intersubjectivity of knowledge in general. Kant is not an incognitivist as a theorist of taste. In short, Kant's solution for the problem of taste has two components, analytical and explanatory. The phenomenon of our pleasure in the beautiful is

isolated by Kant by analysis of the concepts of subjectivity and of the aesthetic.

It should be noted that harmony of reason or of the faculties is the result of aesthetic judgment of reflection. This is what Kant has presented in the Introductions, and he connects the problem of taste with the general theory of reflective judgment. According to him judgments of taste concern the pleasure produced by beautiful objects, and the exercise of reflective judgment can produce such a pleasure.

Section VII of the published Introduction approaches the topic of aesthetic judgment through the concept of subjectivity. The concept is a complex one, and it has some reference to the subject or possessor of knowledge. To call something subjective is to say that it depends upon the constitution of some subject for its existence for the way it appears. But representations which are ontologically subjective can nevertheless have a cognitive import that requires describing them as epistemologically objective. The forms of space and time are ontologically subjective, or are explained by reference to the subject, and yet these are necessary conditions of our representations of objects, they are valid of all the objects of our experience. This is the teaching of the Transcendental Aesthetic part of the Critique of Pure Reason. Space and time are "pure"

forms. But what about colours or pigments in a painting? Kant calls them "impure" representations in the sense that they are dependent upon the physiological constitution of the perceiver, hence colour sensations are to be included in our empirical concepts of objects. But the point is that what is ontologically subjective may also be epistemologically objective, or form part of "objective sensation"<sup>7</sup>. Sensations of pleasure and pain cannot be so incorporated into empirical concepts.

Objective validity (or "logical validity" as Kant calls it in the third Critique VII) is the availability of a representation for "the determination of the object (for the purpose of knowledge)". In the first Critique Kant pays little attention to the question of intersubjective validity. But he appears to have believed that intersubjective validity to be a consequence of objective validity. Colour sensations are said to be not the properties of things, they are "changes in the subject", and may be "different in different persons"<sup>8</sup>. In the Prolegomena Kant asserts that "objective validity and necessary universality (for everybody) are equivalent terms"<sup>9</sup>. In the Third Critique Kant separates the question of intersubjective acceptability from that of objective validity, and thus implies a complex division of the status of representations. All representations may, of course, be regarded as ontologically subjective. But epistemologically, they may be objectively valid; yet they may

enjoy no form of validity. Again, they may be intersubjectively valid, without being objectively valid. So if aesthetic judgment is to be possible, there will have to be representations which are intersubjectively valid without being objectively valid. For Kant, the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is an element of the subjective side of representation which is not objectively valid. This feeling is the subject of aesthetic judgment. That which is purely subjective in a representation of an object, i.e., "what constitutes only its reference to the subject"<sup>10</sup> its "aesthetic quality" is instantiated by the feeling of pleasure and pain. Aesthetic judgment concerns the pleasure or pain occasioned by objects.

In Section VIII of the first Introduction, Kant opens by considering the term "aesthetic" rather than the concept of subjectivity, but arrives at the same result. He notes first that in a phrase such as "an aesthetic mode of representation" the word "aesthetic" connotes the subjective contribution of a form of sensibility to a representation, and is thus compatible with the objective validity of the representation. This usage - Kant's own in the first Critique -- follows the Baumgartian tradition in which the aesthetic is the sensible component of knowledge. In the second edition of the first Critique Kant suggested that we may grant a second sense to "aesthetic"<sup>11</sup>. Calling a mode of representation aesthetic may also express our intention of relating a representation not to the cognitive

faculty but to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. In this sense, Kant points out the aesthetic makes no contribution to the knowledge of objects, but concerns only a sensitivity on the part of the subject. What is aesthetic in this sense is purely subjective in ontological significance. Again, Kant connects the aesthetic with the subjective, and thus prepares to link aesthetic judgment with the non cognitive feeling of pleasure and pain.

The ambiguity of the term "aesthetic" does not attach to the phrase "aesthetic judgment". If we think of a judgment as a knowledge claim, we realize that senses alone can make no judgment. Intuitions are indeed sensuous, but an actual knowledge claim always involves the understanding. So an aesthetic judgment cannot be a knowledge claim based on sensible intuition alone. Hence reference to pleasure or displeasure is intended in the phrase "aesthetic judgment". Kant concludes that an "aesthetic judgment of an object" refers, grammatically, to a relation of a representation to an object, but is actually "a judgment conveying the determination of the subject and his feeling rather than of the object"<sup>12</sup>. An aesthetic judgment is one which concerns a feeling, presumably caused by a given object. Instead of making a knowledge claim about the object, it makes a claim about the feeling it occasions.

Kant next links these considerations to the theory of reflective judgment and argues that in making one kind of judgment about the pleasure occasioned by an object we are making a judgment about the relation of the representation of that object to our cognitive faculties. In the first Critique sensibility and imagination are distinct. In the third Critique imagination is "the faculty intuitions or presentations", and performs the functions assigned to both sensibility and imagination in the first Critique. Further, Kant holds that imagination and understanding are "mutually related". Ordinarily, the relation is "objective and cognitive", and it results in the understanding's assignment of some definite concept to an intuition presented by the imagination. We are not concerned with the relationship between the two faculties, but the knowledge claim which is the product of judgment. We are interested in a proposition rather than in the mental event of judgment itself.

But Kant argues that the same relationship can be viewed subjectively, i.e., we can also consider the mental state from which a cognition issues. We may be conscious of the mental state which is the effect of an object on our cognitive faculties. This consciousness is given by a sensation which is not itself predicated of the object. Kant adds the claim that there is a sensation which manifests the existence of the mental state of judgment itself rather than representing any property of the object judged.

Kant's next step is to forge a link between the faculty of judgment and the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. The lack of objective reference on the part of the feeling makes it the appropriate sensory expression of the subjective side of judgment. To establish the independence of the feeling connected with the subjective side of judgment, Kant maintains that the subjective condition of judgment may obtain even when an actual cognition does not result. Kant writes that "a merely reflective judgment about a particular object can be aesthetic, however, if the judgment, with no concept antecedent to the given intuition, unites the imagination (which merely apprehends the object) with the understanding (which produces a general concept) and perceives a relation between the two cognitive faculties which forms the subjective and merely sensible condition of the objective employment of the faculty of judgment - namely, the harmony of the two faculties with each other"<sup>13</sup>.

The following points emerge from Kant's statement :

(a) that there is a subjective state in which the conditions of judgment are met; (b) the existence of this state may be perceived by means of a sensation (c) this state may obtain independently of the making of an actual knowledge claim about an object. This subjective state is the harmony of the cognitive faculties. The feeling by which it is perceived is that of pleasure. And the claim that it is the existence of this state which is manifest

in aesthetic response is the foundation of Kant's aesthetics.

Let us consider Kant's thesis that pleasure is the sensation linked to the harmony of the faculties. His argument appears to proceed as follows. An aesthetic judgment is one "whose predicate can never become cognitive, although it may contain the general subjective condition for a cognition". The evidence on which such a judgment is made can only be a sensation, otherwise it will not be an aesthetic judgment at all. And if the judgment is to be directed to the state of the subject rather than the nature of the object, the sensation on which it is based cannot form part of the concept of an object. Such a unique sensation is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. The ground of determination of an aesthetic judgment lies in a sensation immediately connected with the feeling of pleasure and pain. Such a sensation may be brought about in two ways. It could be caused directly by the empirical intuition of an object, without the involvement of any higher cognitive faculties at all. A report of such a sensation would be an "aesthetic judgment of sense". Or, it might be effected by the harmonious interplay of the judgment's two cognitive faculties. The expression of such a state would be an "aesthetic judgment of reflection".

Kant appears to assume that the feeling of pleasure and pain is the only feeling incapable of objective employment. This is an old assumption and may be found in Locke<sup>14</sup> as well as in

Berkely<sup>15</sup>. But that pleasure and pain are of subjective significance could use proof. Secondly, Kant's argument treats of a single feeling, and does not discriminate between pleasure and pain. It may be quite natural that pleasure and pain should be connected with the subjective state of our cognitive faculties. But Kant's argument does not show why only pleasure - and not merely pleasure or pain - should express a harmonious state of these faculties.

Kant opens Section VII of the published Introduction with the claim that what is purely subjective in a representative of an object is its "aesthetic quality" and thus the subject matter of aesthetic judgment. He then asserts that it is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure which is this "subjective side of representation" and thus the aesthetic quality. Then Kant employs his concept of finality. "The finality of a thing", he says, "is in no way a quality of the object itself". Finality is subjective when it is independent of or precedes any actual knowledge of an object. It precedes the cognition of an object even without any will to use the representation of the object for cognition. This makes the feeling of pleasure and displeasure and the property of finality both subjective sides of representation, and Kant connects the two. The feeling of pleasure and displeasure becomes the representation of that finality of an object which precedes any cognition of it ; "the object is called final, only because its representation is immediately connected

with the feeling of pleasure, and this representation itself is an aesthetic representation of the finality"<sup>16</sup>. Kant is in fact linking the two phenomena, pleasure and finality, by their common status of subjectivity. If it is merely the fact of subjectivity which associates feeling with finality, why should it be just pleasure and not pleasure or pain which represents finality? Kant is here introducing the claim that our pleasure in the beautiful is linked to an aesthetic quality of finality. The connection of pleasure and finality, which is peculiarly a non-objective property, leads to the heart of Kant's theory.

A harmony between imagination and understanding causes a feeling of pleasure. An object is subjectively or formally purposive because by producing free play between the imagination and the understanding it produces pleasure. But why the harmony of the faculties arouse, or cause, a feeling of pleasure? Section VI of the published Introduction gives a general theory of the production of pleasure. It is in the light of this section that Kant's theory of the pleasure of aesthetic response and its production by the harmony of the faculties may be interpreted.

As Kant puts it, "the attainment of every aim is coupled with a feeling of pleasure"<sup>17</sup>. The same thesis is reiterated at the close of the Analytic of the Beautiful where Kant says that the accomplishment of any objective is invariably connected with delight. One should distinguish objectives and desires, and note Kant's view that the faculty of desire is not involved in every

one of our objectives. Kant's theory of pleasure depends on the view that each of the faculties of mind has the objective of producing the state which it is capable of producing, and the satisfaction of this objective, under certain conditions, produces pleasure. Kant states the fundamental presupposition of the Critique of Judgment's explanation of aesthetic response when he writes, in the Critique of Practical Reason, that "to every faculty of mind an interest can be ascribed, i.e., a principle which contains the condition under which alone its exercise is advanced"<sup>18</sup>. In the second Critique speaks of pleasure connected with desire, while in the third Critique he links pleasure with reflective judgment, and the terminology of 'interest' is given up. However, the idea that each faculty has its own objective is crucial to the third Critique. Thus the attainment of knowledge is the fulfilment of the objective of the faculty of cognition, and ideally, the occasion of a pleasure which does not fulfil an objective set by desire. Correspondingly, the satisfaction of an objective set by the faculty of desire itself may be regarded as the cause of pleasure that does not involve the objectives of the faculty of cognition. And finally, the successful employment of the faculty of reflective judgment must also be seen as the occasion of a pleasure which is independent of the practical aims of the faculty of desire.

Let us now ask, what is the status of Kant's thesis that pleasure is always produced by the satisfaction of an objective?

Kant employs his statement as a law-like premise, but does not introduce the claim with an argument. The thesis cannot be analytic, for it does not say that whatever state persons are in on the attainment of their objective shall be called pleasure. The Thesis connects the attainment of objectives with a feeling of pleasure, and feeling is a single psychological state, in some respects it is phenomenologically identical in all of its occurrences. Thus the thesis as a matter of fact, it must be synthetic, rather than analytic.

Is the thesis synthetic a priori or synthetic a posteriori? In the first Introduction Kant says that a definition of the feeling of pleasure "must be transcendental"<sup>19</sup>, but he offers no transcendental deduction of his proposition. Nor is it any more clear how the adoption of the principle that the attainment of every objective produces pleasure could be a condition of the possibility of human knowledge. The possibility remains that Kant's theory of pleasure might be synthetic a posteriori, a law of human psychology, never ~~disconfirmed~~, though conceivably disconfirmable. A law which links a specific feeling to a specific mental state should be empirical. But Kant is concerned with an a priori principle of taste, and in that case how does he introduce an empirical law into the foundation of his explanation of aesthetic response? The matter appears to be that Kant's defence for an a priori principle of aesthetic judgment has an ultimate limit in empirical psychology.

We have already noticed that the harmony of the faculties is the "sensible" as well as the "subjective" condition of knowledge. Accordingly knowledge may be looked upon from two points of view, the objective and the subjective. The objective point of view is the case when our goal would be the discovery or acquisition of true beliefs or objectively valid judgments. The goal of knowledge from the subjective point of view would consist in the synthetis or unification of our manifolds of intuition, however, achieved. The doctrine of Kant's first Critique is that there can be no synthesis of manifolds without objectively valid judgments. But it can also be said that from a psychological point of view the synthesis of a manifold is what produces an objective valid judgment. As the mental event which has knowledge at its outcome, this synthesis may be thought of as the subjective condition of cognition, and as itself a goal in cognition. Since the harmony of faculties is a state in which the subjective condition of knowledge exists without the use of a concept, and thus without any objective judgment actually being made, this state may be one in which a manifold of intuition, presented by the imagination, is unified, or at least, appears to be unified, without the use of a concept. Unification without a concept is of course contingent, and fulfilment of our aim in knowledge would be unexpected. It would thus be the occasion of a "noticeable pleasure".

The interpretation risked above may not have been a case of a fool's rushing in where even angels fear to tread. If we turn to the first edition account, in the first Critic, of the threefold synthesis, we will see that this includes all the aspects of synthesis except the actual application of a concept of the understanding to the manifold of intuitions<sup>20</sup>. The harmony of the faculties is then a state in which, somehow, a manifold of intuition is run through and held together as a unity by the imagination without the use of a concept. This account of the harmony of the faculties does not assign an active role to the understanding, but it does describe a state in which the imagination is in harmony with the understanding in the sense accomplishing everything that is ordinarily requisite for the successful relation of the understanding to a manifold of intuition.

The imagination in aesthetic response is in harmony with the usual requirements of the understanding, even though the latter does not apply any determinate concept in the state of free play. The imagination accomplishes its synthesis of apprehension on the manifold provided in a representation or by the form of a given object in empirical intuition. That is, the mind is ordinarily disposed to the harmony of the faculties by an object, which we may provisionally suppose is beautiful in virtue of this disposition.

Now to turn to these epistemological bearings on the concept of taste. In the section 9 of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* Kant describes the feeling of pleasure as the determining ground of the judgment of taste. The feeling is the mental state which presents itself in the mutual relation of the powers of representation". This relationship is one of "mutual accord between imagination and understanding, and is also called a relation of "free play", because no definite concept restricts these two faculties to a particular rule of cognition. The imagination in the third Critique is a faculty of intuitions. And taste as a subjective faculty of judgment contains imagination as a principle of subsumption. The ordinary relationship of the faculties, when marked by an absence of a concept, is not altered but for the "lawfulness"<sup>21</sup> of the imagination. There obtains combination of a manifold by the imagination, which schematizes without a concept<sup>22</sup>. Kant intimates that the unity of the manifold is represented by a feeling rather than a concept.

The concept of taste is finally a "faculty for estimating an object in relation to the free lawfulness of the imagination"<sup>23</sup>. Taste is a state of the imagination, free and productive, such that aesthetic response is a state of "lawfulness without a law". In short, for aesthetic response to occur the ordinary condition for cognition must be met without the imagination feeling constrained by consciousness of a rule.

So far we have given an account of Kant's theory of taste in general on the basis of the two Introductions. But what about his theory of taste for art in particular. For this purpose we shall have to turn to the third Critique itself. This we propose to undertake in the following chapter.

R E F E R E N C E S

1. FI II
2. Ibid.
3. CJ III
4. FI III
5. CJ, III
6. CJ, III
7. Ibid.
8. FI, V
9. Prolegomena, Section 19
10. CJ, VII
11. CPR, B 35, 36
12. FI, VIII
13. Ibid.
14. Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,  
bk II, Ch 8, section 18.
15. Berkeley, Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous,  
First Dialogue.
16. CJ, VII
17. CJ, VII
18. Critique of Practical Reason
19. FI, VIII
20. CPR A98 and A100
21. CJ, section 35
22. Ibid.
23. CJ, section 22.