

The role of disinterestedness in Kant's  
aesthetic experience

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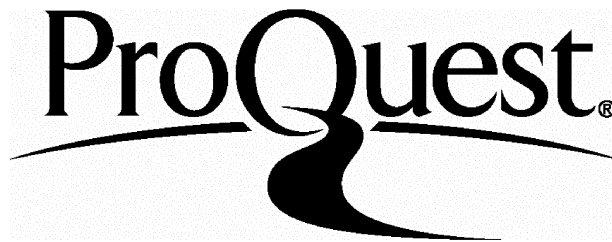
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## Abstract

This thesis assesses the role of disinterestedness in Kant's aesthetics, and how Kant analyses disinterested pleasure which he takes to ground the judgment of taste. The thesis considers what are the conditions of a genuine judgment of taste and assesses how Kant uses those conditions to distinguish judgments of beauty from other judgments.

In chapter 2 and chapter 7, Kant's distinction between free and dependent beauty is analysed, and in both chapters it is argued that the notion of dependent beauty is not coherent.

In chapter 3, Kant's definitions of interest in the Critique of Judgment are assessed and found to be inadequate.

In chapter 4, dispositions that are deemed by Kant to be inappropriate to the grounds of the proper judgment of taste are assessed.

In chapter 5, Kant's attempt to distinguish the agreeable from the beautiful is considered, and found to be unsuccessful. Chapter 6 considers the role of necessity in attempting to circumvent that third objection, and the view that the "aesthetic ought" serves as an effective means of answering the first and second objections.

Chapter 7 argues that the notion of aesthetic ideas is not coherent and so cannot serve to account for the spiritual need we have in the beautiful, it cannot figure in an account of why we should acquire taste.

Chapter 8 casts doubt on the extent to which a desire to have our spiritual needs met in art and nature can account for our interest in them.

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## Introduction

Disinterestedness has been held to be fundamental in explaining aesthetic pleasure. Claims have been made for the concept's importance in accounts of how we distinguish our appreciation of beautiful things from the wide range of other things we value, such as useful objects, moral characters, or sensuous pleasures.

Disinterestedness, furthermore, has a historical pedigree as a concept in aesthetics. Aristotle and Aquinas thought that the beautiful object resists one type of activity, while encouraging another: we appreciate it for its own sake, and we value the pleasure we get from so doing, rather than valuing the object or the experience because of their fittingness for furthering ulterior ends.

But, as Stolnitz<sup>1</sup> argues, the concept of disinterestedness was developed originally in the 18th century by British aestheticians. Starting with Shaftesbury, they developed an account of the role of disinterestedness in aesthetic experience that was to prove influential. Some of those aestheticians, such as Alison, developed an account of the aesthetic attitude that was proper to contemplation of beautiful things, rather than considering that it was the aesthetic response to a work of art that should be properly disinterested. It is with the latter, the disinterested pleasure that we take in a beautiful thing, that we shall be concerned in this thesis. That is not to suggest that there cannot be a proper, and disinterested, aesthetic attitude, nor that those philosophers such as Kant who have developed accounts of the proper nature of the aesthetic response to beautiful things, have not held also that there is a proper aesthetic attitude to such things.

In this thesis, we shall chiefly be concerned with the role of disinterestedness in Kant's Critique of Judgment. This is because Kant offers the most systematic account of the concept, building what he had originally thought of as the merely empirical matter of

aesthetic experience into his critical, architectonic philosophy. We shall also be concerned with how his analysis of the concept fits into his analysis of the genuine judgment of taste, with his account of art, and with recent reconstructions and refinements of his writings on aesthetics, particularly those carried out by Anthony Savile.

### Notes on Introduction

1. Jerome Stolnitz, 'On the Origins of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness"', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 1961, vol. 20, pp.131-144.

## Chapter 1: Genuine judgments of taste

### i) Criteria for genuine judgments of taste

In the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant sets out four conditions for the genuine judgment of taste. These correspond to the four moments of the first book of the Critique of Judgment. The character of the genuine judgment of taste that emerges from these four moments is as follows. It is grounded in the disinterested pleasure; the disinterested pleasure is taken in the form of an object or action; the disinterested pleasure taken in that beautiful object or action is universal, in that there are no conditions specific to the person making that judgment that are relevant to the grounds of that judgment; and the pleasure taken in the object is in some sense necessary.

There will be much more to say about each of these conditions in later chapters, not least the last one. The condition of necessity can be understood as fundamental to the genuine judgment of taste when one considers that Kant hopes, in the course of the Analytic of the Beautiful, to distinguish the judgment of taste from the judgment of agreeableness. The latter judgment is conceived of by Kant as grounded in the private feeling of delight, and yet, there is a possibility that everyone could take delight in an object of agreeable pleasure and make similar judgments of agreeableness on that object. That possibility - of universal delight being taken in an agreeable object - is one that Kant is aware of, and one which he seeks to distinguish from the possibility of everyone making the same judgment of taste about a beautiful object. For, in the former case, that convergence of judgments about an object would be accidental; in the latter case there would be nothing accidental about that universal agreement in judgment: it would spring from the nature of the judgment of taste. Thus, necessity is a

fundamental condition for Kant in setting out the nature of the judgment of taste.

Kant contends that the judgment of taste must be grounded in subjective feelings of pleasure or displeasure: that is why he states at the outset of the first moment that the judgment of taste is aesthetic. But that is not all: the judgment of taste must be grounded in the judge's own experience of the object. One can imagine a circumstance when someone held a thing to be beautiful without experiencing it and yet that judgment was grounded on delight. For example, if a friend tells me that Rinaldo and Armida is a beautiful painting, and I have past experience of his judgments on paintings being in agreement with mine and so can predict safely that his judgment would be the same as mine had I seen the painting, I may make the judgment "Rinaldo and Armida is a beautiful painting" with confidence.

There are two reasons why Kant would not allow that such a judgment is a genuine judgment of taste. First, it is not grounded in my subjective feelings of pleasure or displeasure: it is a judgment grounded in a confident inference from past experience. Second, it is not a judgment of taste because my experience of the painting does not figure in the determining ground of the judgment. It may be the case that I am delighted on hearing my friend's descriptions of the painting and the other reasons that led him to make his judgment, so that I do have subjective feelings about the painting. But that is not enough for it to be a judgment of taste, since those subjective feelings do not enter into the determining ground of my judgment on the painting; rather they are mere components of my reaction to my friend's judgment and play no role in grounding my subsequent judgment.

Moreover, the judgment that I make about the painting cannot be a genuine judgment of taste because I have not yet seen



it. That is, Kant insists that the genuine judgment of taste meets the acquaintance principle. Wollheim characterises that principle as that “which insists that judgments of aesthetic value, unlike judgments of moral knowledge, must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not, except within very narrow limits, transmissible from one person to another.”<sup>1</sup> Kant does not allow any such transmission for genuine judgments of taste. Instead, he insists that the judgment of taste must be grounded in the subjective experience of the person making that judgment. That is part of the force of his remark: “The judgment of taste, therefore, is not a cognitive judgment, and so not logical, but is aesthetic - which means that it is one whose determining ground *cannot be other than subjective*.”<sup>2</sup>

#### ii) Content and ground

Savile asserts that judgments of taste “are at most a subclass of judgments in which beauty is ascribed to something. In particular, and this for Kant is a matter of real definition, they are those judgments that something is beautiful which are *made on certain preferential grounds*.”<sup>3</sup> A judgment made on such grounds (the grounds considered in section i)), may well have the same content as another judgment not made on such grounds, but without being so grounded it is not a genuine judgment of taste. Thus, it is not the case that all judgments to the effect that something is beautiful are judgments of taste.

Not all commentators have recognised this point, and at least some seem to have ascribed to Kant the view that all judgments of beauty are judgments of taste. (Thus, for instance, Zangwill writes: “I defend the general idea that judgments of beauty are made on the basis of a felt pleasure”<sup>4</sup> - but judgments of taste and not all

judgments of beauty are made on the basis of a felt pleasure (or displeasure); and it is only the thesis that the judgment of taste is made on the basis of felt pleasure that can properly be defended).

Savile explores some of the other characteristics of the genuine judgment of taste. It is not a proposition, since one can entertain a proposition that something is beautiful without judging it to be so. For example, “Natural Born Killers is an appalling film, according to the critics, and for that reason it will not do well at the box office.” Here the proposition that the film is bad is entertained, but the film is not judged to be bad by the person entertaining the proposition in the quoted sentence. Nor is the judgment of taste an assertion, since to assert something one need not judge it to be the case; and to judge something to be the case, one need not assert it.

But the most interesting distinction Savile makes is to distinguish judgments of taste from appraisals of a thing’s beauty. The former are based on disinterested pleasure, while the latter need not be. For example, one may rank films according to the number of favourable verdicts from newspaper critics, but such an appraisal has nothing to do with the genuine judgment of taste. This distinction is interesting because it suggests yet another way in which aesthetic discourse functions.

### iii) Judgments of free and dependent beauty

Kant distinguishes free from dependent beauty as follows. “In the estimate of a free beauty (according to mere form) we have the pure judgment of taste . . . But the beauty of a man (including under this head that of a man, woman, or child), the beauty of a horse, or of a building (such as a church, palace, arsenal or summer-house), presupposes a concept of the end that defines what the thing has to be and consequently a concept of its perfection; and is therefore merely appendant beauty.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, for example, when I judge a

painting of a woman as a representation of a woman, I cannot judge the painting to be beautiful until I have brought it under a concept. The same is true of a church, or any other building designed to serve a function. I cannot judge it as a beautiful example of a church until I have brought the representation under the concept "church". Scruton writes on this issue: "When I perceive a representational picture, or a building, I can have no impression of beauty until I have first brought the object under concepts, referring in one case to the context expressed, in the other to the function performed."<sup>6</sup> This seems to go too far: a representational painting may be judged to be beautiful on account of its formal structure, rather than in the way it fulfils the end of being a representation of a woman. Similarly, a church can be judged to be beautiful on account of its formal structure, without reference to how well it serves its function. These two judgments would be free judgments of taste, since they are not constrained by considerations of how good the representational painting or the church are in terms of the end for which they were intended (in the first case, this would be to suppose that the representational painting was painted to represent a woman, rather than to delight on account of its formal qualities - although in practice such a painting could be intended to do one or the other, or both).

This is the point that Kant makes when he writes: "In respect of an object with a definite internal end, a judgment of taste would only be pure where the person judging either has no concept of this end, or else makes abstraction from it in his judgment."<sup>7</sup> There is a tension between the predicative judgment of taste that concerns the formal beauty of a painting, and the attributive judgment of taste that concerns its beauty relative to the way in which it exemplifies its end, and in the sentences following the quoted passage, Kant explores one aspect of that tension. That aspect is

the possibility that one who makes a judgment of taste on, say, a representational painting without regard to the way in which it fulfils its end as a representation of a woman, but rather in terms of its beautiful shapes, lines and tonal qualities, could be contradicted by another considering the painting as a representation and who would accuse the first person of false taste. Kant says that realising this helps to resolve some disputes between critics. But it is important to notice that the dispute is not resolved by condemning one position and confirming another; instead, it is resolved by pointing out that the dispute is based on mutual misunderstanding.

The plausibility of the distinction between free and dependent beauty, however, is reduced because in section 15, which precedes Kant's discussion of this distinction, he insists that "the judgment of taste is entirely independent of the concept of perfection"<sup>8</sup>. Thus, Kant writes: "What is formal in the representation of a thing, i.e. the agreement of its manifold with a unity (i.e. irrespective of what it is to be) does not, of itself, offer us any cognition whatsoever of objective finality. For since abstraction is made from this unity as *end* (what the thing is to be) nothing is left but the subjective finality of the representations in the mind of the Subject intuiting."<sup>9</sup> Such abstraction is treated in this section as though it is necessary for the judgment on a thing that has been created to serve an end to be a genuine judgment of taste: if we abstract from the representation of an end, we are left with the form of finality which is the proper object of the disinterested delight that grounds the genuine judgment of taste. This is consistent with what has been said in the third moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful, whose conclusion is: "Beauty is the form of *finality* of an object, so far as perceived in it *apart from the representation of an end*."<sup>10</sup>

If, then, we took section 15 as our guide, there could be no

question of a judgment of taste that was a judgment of dependent beauty, because the latter is not properly independent of the concept of perfection, and that independence is stipulated of the genuine judgment of taste. However, in section 16, Kant allows that there are impure and pure judgments of taste - the former being dependent judgments, but judgments of taste nonetheless. The dependent judgment, however, cannot be a judgment of taste if it concerns merely the goodness of a thing at serving the function for which it has been designed.

It is arguable that the notion of a judgment of dependent beauty is incoherent. Let us consider different alternatives for making Kant's suggestive but hardly fully developed notion more plausible.

The first alternative is that the judgment of dependent beauty is a conjunctive judgment. For example, when someone says "This is a beautiful church", that means "This is a church and it is beautiful". It is the case that the two latter judgments will be taken to be true by the speaker who makes the first judgment, but that in no way implies that the first judgment can be analysed to mean a conjunction of the two latter judgments. The thought behind the conjunctive thesis is that if an x is a beautiful F, it must at least be an F if it is to be judged beautiful. Put this way, the thesis is trivially true, but it is clearly not what Kant intends in proposing the notion of dependent beauty. In making that proposal, Kant suggests that the judgment of dependent beauty combines the good with beauty. In the example above, it is not just that the object judged beautiful is a church, but that it is a good, or perfect, church that is relevant to the judgment of taste.

Furthermore, the conjunctive thesis cannot serve to make the notion of dependent beauty more plausible, since the conjunction consists in combining a determinant judgment and a reflective

judgment, and Kant stipulates that the genuine judgment of taste is a reflective and not a determinant judgment.

The second alternative is that the judgment “This is a beautiful church” is one that judges the church relative to how well it exemplifies the end for which it was designed (or for which it *appears* to have been designed - this allows us to consider cases of natural beauty as well as artistic products). Thus, this second thesis holds that when one says that “this is a beautiful church”, one is judging that the church well exemplifies, or perhaps even beautifully exemplifies, the end for which it was designed. But that cannot be what is meant by such a judgment. It is possible that a church may be a bad example of a church, but that it is beautiful nonetheless. A church may have had its roof stolen, its spire damaged by bombs and its pews ripped out by vandals, but it may be beautiful in that it delights disinterestedly on account of its form. However, it would not be considered to be a good example of the end for which it was designed: it is not good at serving the function of a place of worship for which it was designed. In fact, the church could be a bad example of that end for which it was designed - a ruin, for example - and yet it could be beautiful; moreover, it would be an object about which one could make the judgment of dependent beauty that “this is a beautiful church”. The advantage of the second alternative is that it accounts for the concept of perfection that Kant holds is relevant to the judgment of dependent beauty; its disadvantage is that it fails to do justice to the character of judgments of dependent beauty.

A third alternative is that judgments of dependent beauty are concealed judgments of free beauty. This is clearly not what Kant proposes when he makes the distinction between pure and impure judgments, but perhaps it is the best that can be salvaged of the distinction. The thought behind this redundancy thesis is that, for

example, “This is a beautiful church”, is a judgment of taste grounded in the disinterested delight taken in subjective finality of form, but in which the reference to the church merely serves to pick out the object which the speaker is judging to be beautiful. Thus, the church is not judged as to whether it is a good church at all, and what disinterestedly delights is the form, just as in the case of such free beauties as flowers and other natural beauties that have no meaning or no concept of an end. This redundancy thesis is little more than a counsel of despair, for if it was the best that could be done to sustain Kant’s distinction it would render his analysis of judgments of taste implausible, not least because it would fail to satisfactorily account for the pleasure that we take in works of art - most of which delight not just because they exhibit pleasing forms, but which also express ideas or treat subjects which we consider to be valuable, and do so in ways that we consider valuable. Furthermore, Kant needs the distinction between free and dependent beauty to be made plausible, since his conception of art as expressing aesthetic ideas can only be tenable if works of art are taken as dependent rather than free beauties. In terms of works of fine art, only non-programmatic music and some sculptures could be reasonably taken to be free beauties.

The third alternative, then, is inadequate to Kant’s aims, and is unsatisfactory in accounting for the way in which we judge things to be beautiful.

A fourth alternative is that developed by Savile in Kantian Aesthetics Pursued. Savile argues that it is wrong to take the judgment of dependent beauty as one in which an object is judged to be beautiful *because* it is manifestly well adapted to its purpose. “It is not remotely plausible to say that a dray-horse is beautiful as it is judged to look well fitted to its barrel-pulling duties.”<sup>11</sup> This rules out one interpretation of the second alternative, where, for

example, a church is judged beautiful *because* it in some way well exemplifies the end for which it appears to have been designed. However, it opens the way for a more sophisticated version of the second alternative, where well-adaptedness or perfection is necessary if a thing is to be judged dependently beautiful.

This sophisticated version is Savile's account of how the notion of dependent beauty can be made plausible. "[T]here is no suggestion that the pleasure that such individuals give us is grounded in their perfection: it is just that only the evidently perfect ones give us the pleasure. They have to be perfect to be beautiful. Full stop."<sup>12</sup>

But how does this version help to overcome the difficulties which beset the second alternative? A church may not be beautiful *because* it gives us pleasure, but is it any more convincing to suggest that it must be perfect *if* it is to be judged beautiful? The same points about churches that are ill adapted to serve the ends for which they were designed, that we made against the second alternative, seem to tell against Savile's alternative. Savile denies that such points do make his reconstruction of the notion of dependent beauty implausible: "[T]here are things like churches which we only find beautiful when in their form they are manifestly well adapted to their purposes. Here, we are unable to abstract from the standard of perfection that comes with the identification of the individual as belonging to the dependent type: *church*. It is only the manifestly perfect church that can be truly beautiful."<sup>13</sup> Savile will need an argument to make these assertions convincing.

Savile takes Kant's discussion of the "ideal of beauty" in section 17 to show how these assertions can be made convincing. There, Kant takes the "perfect man" of a given race or culture to be a physiological mean, or typical man. Savile writes that Kant's "thought seems to be that only insofar as an individual



approximates to this mean is there any real chance of finding him able to embody or express the idea of human dignity.”<sup>14</sup> Savile uses this example to demonstrate that the demand for perfection can be taken fairly loosely in the parallel case of the judgment of dependent beauty.

The problem is that the demand has to be taken so loosely that any talk of perfection seems out of place. Thus, in the case of the beautiful ruined church, there is a sense in which the building must fall under the concept church, but there is no sense in which it approximates to some mean or indeed standard of perfection if it is to be judged beautiful. If one took the notions of well adaptedness or perfection sufficiently loosely, of course, even the ruined church could be said to approximate to the typical, or perfect church, but it would be such a distant approximation as to make talk of perfection inappropriate.

Perhaps Savile’s move here would be to suggest that the judgment that a ruined church is beautiful is not a judgment of dependent beauty, but a judgment of free beauty. Thus, such a church is so ill adapted to its purposes that it cannot be considered perfect, and thus cannot be judged to be a dependent beauty; however, it is judged beautiful on account of its form, just as patterned wallpaper disinterestedly delights. But this is not a compelling move, since the church may well delight on account of features intrinsically linked to its design as a church. It may have no roof, pews or spire, but may delight on account of the excellence of its other features; what is more it may well exhibit pleasing features that are not reducible to the formal qualities characteristic of the objects of delight in the case of the judgment of free beauty. That is, it may have some features that are perfect and some that are ruined; nonetheless it can still be a beautiful church.

The example of the church indicates that it is not necessary

that an x is well-adapted as an F if x is to be judged a beautiful F. This does not rule out the possibility that in some cases an x will have to be well-adapted as an F before it can be judged as a beautiful F, but that would be merely a contingent matter and not one that could be stipulated of all cases in which an x is a beautiful F.

We have not been able to make the notion of dependent beauty coherent. If the notion cannot be made coherent, then this causes problems for Kant's account of art which Savile is concerned to defend. We shall consider how the notion of dependent beauty is used to account for judgments of artistic beauty in chapter 7.

#### v) Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed what Kant considers is a genuine judgment of taste. We have also considered Kant's distinction between free and dependent judgments of taste, but have not been able to find or devise a satisfactory account of the latter. We shall consider the ramifications of these difficulties for Kant's conception of art in chapter 7.

Notes on Chapter 1

1. Richard Wollheim, Art and its Objects (Cambridge University Press, 1980), supplementary essay VI 'Art and Evaluation', p.233.
2. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment (Oxford University Press, 1992), p.41.
3. Anthony Savile, Kantian Aesthetics Pursued (Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p.5.
4. Nick Zangwill, 'UnKantian Notions of Disinterest', British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 32, 1992, p.151.
5. Kant, op. cit., p.73.
6. Roger Scruton, Kant (Oxford University Press, 1982), p.87.
7. Kant, op. cit., p.74.
8. Ibid., p.69.
9. Ibid., p.70.
10. Ibid., p.80.
11. Savile., op. cit., p.113.
12. Ibid., p.114.
13. Ibid., p.115.
14. Ibid., p.115.

## Chapter 2: Definitions of Interest

### i) Kant's definitions of interest in the Critique of Judgment

KANT defines interest in two ways in the Critique of Judgment.

First, he writes: "The delight which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object is called an interest."<sup>1</sup> Second, he defines interest as "delight in the existence of an object or action."<sup>2</sup>

The first definition is offered at the start of section 2 of the Analytic of the Beautiful, where Kant's aim is to demonstrate that the delight which determines the judgment of taste is independent of all interest. He writes: "One must not be in the least predisposed in favour of the real existence of the thing, but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge in matters of taste."<sup>3</sup>

But how helpful is this definition in serving that aim? Guyer<sup>4</sup> sets out three objections to the first definition. First, he argues that Kant here defines interest as a kind of pleasure, rather than a ground of pleasure. Guyer writes: "[B]ut if the aim of reflection in aesthetic judgment is to isolate pleasures due to the harmony of faculties by excluding those due to interest, it would seem that interest must be a *source* rather than a kind of pleasure."<sup>5</sup> That is, Kant should not have equated interest with pleasure or delight; an interest is something, Guyer maintains, such that when it is realised it may yield pleasure. If one wants chocolate, for instance, one has an interest in chocolate and when one eats it, that gives pleasure. The pleasure here is consequent on the interest rather than identical with it.

But an interest may also be consequent upon a pleasure. Thus, if one eats chocolate and enjoys it, that may furnish an

interest in eating chocolate again, because one has the expectation of a pleasurable experience. On this point, Kant writes: “Now, that a judgment on an object by which its agreeableness is affirmed, expresses an interest in it, is evident from the fact that through sensation it provokes a desire for similar objects, consequently the delight presupposes, not the simple judgment about it, but the bearing its real existence has upon my state so far as affected by such an Object.”<sup>6</sup> That is not to say that once I have eaten some chocolate I will want some more; rather, that if I do want some more, the reason for that will be the interest in it caused by the original pleasurable experience. The same, Kant argues, cannot be true of disinterested pleasures. I may want to keep looking at a beautiful painting because of the pleasurable experience that I am enjoying; I may want to preserve the painting because I found the pleasurable experience valuable and one that others should share; I may even hope to have further pleasurable experiences of looking at the painting at some later date; but there is no question of a desire being provoked for “similar objects” by a disinterested pleasure.

Indeed, the notion of a “similar object” in the case of a disinterested pleasure would be puzzling: because, as we shall see later in the thesis, Kant argues that the pleasure that we take in a beautiful object is without a concept, we could not guarantee that something that fell under the same description of the painting (for example, “by Rembrandt” or “hanging in the National Gallery”) would please (that is, would produce disinterested pleasure), while we could guarantee that one bar of Cadbury’s Dairy Milk chocolate would please as much as another (that is, it would produce interested pleasure).

Guyer’s first objection, then, is convincing. If a delight was the same thing as an interest, we would not be able to explain the

causal history of an interested pleasure, a causal history in which an interest must play a part. It is more convincing to regard an interest as providing an incentive to consume, possess or use an object than to equate it with the delight that one may experience on consuming, possessing or using it.

As a result, Kant should have written in his first definition above: “The delight which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object is grounded in interest.” But that would leave obscure what an interest is; we would still be awaiting a proper definition. That is what Guyer hopes to offer: we shall consider his proposal in the next section.

Guyer’s second objection is that the phrase “representation of the real existence of an object” is not clear, especially as “representation” and “real existence” might naturally be taken as opposites. This does not seem to be a strong objection. For instance, if one spoke of the “representation of the real world”, it could be admitted that the two terms are opposites, but that does not mean that the phrase is nonsensical or contradictory. If one saw a picture of the world, one might say that it is a “representation of the real world”. Kant’s use of the term “representation” is not unlike its use in this example. The real world is represented when one reflects on the kind of delight one experiences and one finds that that delight is interested; the real world is not represented when one reflects on the delight one experiences and one considers that it is disinterested - or so Kant argues.

Nevertheless, Kant is very confusing on the question of interest. At one point he defines an interest as a “delight which we connect with the representation of the real existence of an object”; at another he defines an interest as a “delight at the real existence of an object or action”; later in the Analytic of the Beautiful Kant

characterises interested pleasures as “determined not merely by the representation of the object, but also by the represented bond of connection between the Subject and the real existence of the object.”<sup>7</sup> It is by no means clear that these characterisations of interest are consistent, and it is perhaps not surprising that conflicting interpretations of Kant’s position on interested pleasures have been offered.

Whewell<sup>8</sup>, for instance, interprets Kant as being wholly concerned with the ontological status (i.e. its real existence) of the object in determining whether the pleasure one takes in it is interested or disinterested. He makes the distinction between interested and disinterested pleasure by means of an example. A person who is thirsty will be disappointed when the lake which he has been observing turns out to be a mirage; another person who has been contemplating the lake because he finds it beautiful may not be disappointed to find out that the lake is a mirage. The first person is not now able to quench his thirst - whether he is able to do so depends on the ontological status of the lake; the second person, by contrast, continues to pleasurably experience the mirage - his pleasure is not dependent on the ontological status of the lake.

Whewell’s interpretation is not committed to any of the three characterisations of interest, but it seems closest to the second definition. That is because he treats interested delight as pleasure in the real existence of the object. His interpretation is not committed to that definition, however, because he is not obliged to define interest in that way: it is still open for him to account for interest by means of its role in the causal history of a delight.

McCloskey<sup>9</sup>, by contrast, argues that the notion of the “represented bond of connection” concerns the real existence of the

object relative to the wants of the Subject: when one eats chocolate, the pleasure one obtains (an interested, appetitive pleasure in Kant's view) is not just taken in the real existence of the object (which is necessary if one is to be able to experience the chocolate). Rather, the pleasure is taken in the fact that the object exists in such a way as to give pleasure. When one reflects on one's pleasure, in this case, what is represented in that reflection is not the real existence of the object, McCloskey argues, but the bond of connection between the real existence of the object and the Subject. McCloskey argues that this more satisfyingly characterises interested pleasures in terms of desire than in terms of ontological status. This is plausible, not least as Kant's first definition of interest is followed by this remark: "Such a delight, therefore, always involves a reference to the faculty of desire."<sup>10</sup>

Guyer maintains that it is necessary for Kant to define interest as something other than "delight at the real existence of an object" if his definition is to be informative and consistent with a central thesis of the Critique of Pure Reason. In the first Critique, Kant argues that existence is not a real predicate. Thus, it cannot be argued that someone can be delighted at the real existence of an object: what is important is not the ontological status of the object per se, but its availability for consumption, possession or use by the subject. Guyer writes: "The difference between a possible and a real object lies not in any intrinsic feature of the object itself, but in the network of causal connections and dependencies, of which a real object is part, but a possible object is not."<sup>11</sup> It is necessary that the object exists for it to be used and thus yield pleasure: as Kant remarked in the Critique of Pure Reason, my financial position is affected very differently by money rather than the mere concept of it.<sup>13</sup> But it is not sufficient: one's delight at the chocolate is not just delight at its ontological status, but at the bond of connection



between its real existence and the subject. A proper description of the relation between interest and existence must also, if it is to be informative, account for the role of desires in the development of an interest in an object, and in the role of interest in providing an incentive for reason to make the object desired available for use, a use that will satisfy the interest and yield pleasure.

However, Guyer's point is not a good one. It may indeed be a central thesis of the Critique of Pure Reason that existence is not a predicate, but that does not mean that one cannot be delighted at the existence of an object. If there is a French restaurant in Ulan Bator, I may be delighted at the thought that it exists, not out of any desires or interests that the restaurant satisfies, but simply that it exists. In this case, I am not delighted because of the availability for possession or use of the restaurant, but disinterestedly delighted that the restaurant exists. Delight of this kind may be rare, but it is possible. This case does not provide a counter example that undermines Guyer's general view that Kant's definition of interest in the Critique of Judgment is misguided, but it does provide a counter example to his view that delight cannot be taken in the existence of a thing. This counter example, furthermore, does not imply that existence is a real predicate.

Does McCloskey offer the right interpretation of Kant and what bearing does the answer to that question have on Guyer's second objection? The argument above maintained that ontological status is not sufficient for determining whether a pleasure is interested. That is, when one becomes conscious, through reflection, of the interested nature of one's pleasure, it is necessary that one becomes conscious of the link between one's desire and the real existence of the object. In this case, one's delight is interested because there is a reference to the faculty of desire. One could express this by saying that in the determining ground of the

aesthetic judgment which is not a pure judgment of taste, there is always a reference to the faculty of desire.

Thus, McCloskey's interpretation seems more in accord with Kant than Whewell's. But is not Kant's first definition of interest still confusing, as Guyer claims? For the notion of the "delight that we connect with the real existence of an object or action" is not obviously the same as the notion of the "represented bond of connection between the Subject and the real existence of an object" that McCloskey seeks to defend in her interpretation of Kant. For in the latter characterisation, the represented bond of connection leaves it open to Kant to refer to much more than the feeling of pleasure as being connected with the real existence of the object. Indeed, that formulation leaves it open for Kant to specify the nature of the causal connections between the Subject and the real existence of the object; and those will be causal connections in which delight will feature (for instance, as consequent upon an interest, or as prompting an interest). The first definition is also unsatisfactory, then, because it merely links delight with real existence, when we require a much more complex or at least suggestive account of the way in which desire, real existence and interest are linked if we are to have a good definition of interest. This point, of course, can also be made about the second definition: that too is inadequate.

Guyer's second objection, then, is not successful, because if we are to understand the complex links between desire, real existence and interest, then we will need a distinction between representation and real existence. We need this distinction, because we want to uphold the view that real existence is not a real predicate, and, following from this, because we have concluded that the links between pleasure and existence Kant makes in his two definitions are insufficient to specify the complicated nature of

that connection. What is important for interested pleasure is not real existence as such, but the bond that enables one, when reflecting on the nature of one's pleasure, to determine the causal connections between desire and interest and the pleasure that one feels.

Guyer's third objection is as follows. "Just what connection between delight and the existence of its object is intended is obscure; as it stands, the definition would call an interest any delight connected with existence, whether it precede, accompany or succeed it. This will cause difficulty."<sup>12</sup> Guyer wants an account of the connection between delight and existence that perspicuously accounts for the role of interest; merely equating interest and delight does not do this.

This point is crucial to Guyer, since much of his project in his analysis of the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment consists in introducing, accounting for and defending a plausible notion of interest which he takes from Kant's writings on moral philosophy and inserts into his reconstruction of the Kantian aesthetic system. In the next section we will consider the plausibility of this part of Guyer's project.

#### ii) Guyer's reconstruction of Kant's definition of disinterestedness

Guyer finds a definition of interest in Kant's Critique of Practical Reason, a book written only two years before the Critique of Judgment, which he finds much more satisfying. In the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant defines interest as "an incentive of the will so far as it is presented by reason"<sup>13</sup>. Guyer notes that in the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant speaks of interest as "that by which reason becomes practical, i.e., a cause determining the will."<sup>14</sup>

This characterisation enables Kant to avoid the difficulties we

considered in the previous section. First, it does not equate interest with desire. Second, it is properly neutral as to whether an interest is the cause or effect of a feeling of pleasure. It may be the case that the desire one has for an object, which creates an interest in that object, is prompted by a former experience of pleasure; it also may be the case that an interest in an object is causally significant in the pleasure that one experiences when one consumes, possesses or uses that object. We should at this point account for the relationship between interest and desire. An interest is a concept of an object which gives an incentive for the faculty of desire to bring about a state of affairs. If one desires an object, one has an interest in it and vice versa; but that does not mean that the two are to be equated - the conception of the object (the interest) prompts a desire for that object. Third, this characterisation enables us to understand how reason is involved in the bringing about of an interested pleasure. For, if an interest gives the faculty of desire an incentive to bring about a state of affairs, reason will be employed to fulfil that desire.

This characterisation also helps Kant to avoid the following difficulty. Kant equates interest with a feeling of pleasure in the Critique of Judgment, but, if he does so and this definition is consistently applied throughout the rest of Kant's philosophical system, that would lead to the undesirable result that Kant's ethical system would be grounded in the desire for pleasure, pleasure which was brought about by the exercise of reason. This is an undesirable result for Kant since he contends in his ethics that respect for the moral law is the sole moral incentive. Guyer is aware of this purported difficulty and deals with it by arguing that "for this reason too the concept of interest cannot be explained as simply delight in the existence of an object".<sup>15</sup> But that is not the only point to be made here: it is not just that moral interest cannot

be equated with delight, but that moral interest does not have the same kind of relationship to delight as does the interest one takes in the agreeable. In the former case, one may experience pleasure at the performance of a good action, but that could never give one the incentive to perform the action; if feelings of pleasure are regularly associated with morally good actions (Kant believed that they were), they arise because of one's consciousness that an object conforms with the moral law, not because one has aimed at pleasure in one's moral actions. If one is convinced by Kant's views on ethics, then, one will accept that it is reverence for the moral law that provides the incentive for or interest in bringing about an object or action. If it was true that feelings of pleasure were the *only* incentives to the will, then this would undermine a central part of Kant's ethics which argues that reason properly determines action. Guyer is concerned that Kantian ethics risk becoming Humean, wherein "reason is the slave of the passions". In the case of an agreeable object or action, the feeling of pleasure one expects to experience does provide the incentive to bring about that object or action: experience of pleasure is not only regularly associated with the agreeable, but it explains why one sought to bring about that state of affairs.

### iii) Conclusion

The definitions of interest in the Analytic of the Beautiful are inadequate to account for the complicated relationship between interest, desire and existence. Guyer's use of Kant's definition of interest in his moral philosophy enables him to develop a much more sophisticated account of that relationship. In the next chapter, we will consider how the notion of interest can be put to work to provide an analysis of the judgment of taste.

Notes on Chapter 2

1. Kant, op. cit., p.42.
2. Ibid., p.46.
3. Ibid., p.43.
4. Paul Guyer, Kant and the Claims of Taste (Harvard University Press, 1979), pp.174-5.
5. Ibid., pp174-5.
6. Kant, op. cit., p.45.
7. Ibid., p.48.
8. David Whewell, article on Kant, in A Companion to Aesthetics, edited by David Cooper (Blackwell, 1992), pp.250-254.
9. Mary A. McCloskey, Kant's Aesthetic (MacMillan, 1987), p41.
10. Kant, op. cit., p.42.
11. Guyer, op. cit., p.193.
12. Ibid., p.175.
13. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason (Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), p82.
14. Guyer, op. cit., p.183.
15. Ibid., p.185.
16. Ibid., pp. 183-4.
17. p.185.

## Chapter 3: The role of disinterestedness in the Critique of Judgment

### i) The criterion of disinterestedness

Why is disinterestedness important for Kant? In the Critique of Judgment, it is used to distinguish pure judgments of taste from other judgments that are grounded in pleasure or displeasure. Kant claims that both delight in the good and delight in the agreeable involve a desire for an object and therefore an interest in it. What is agreeable makes a direct appeal to the senses and so arouses an inclination to consume, possess or use the agreeable object. As we saw in the previous chapter, this interest is connected with the real existence of the object. By contrast, a pure judgment of taste is not based on some connection between interest and the real existence of the object or action. Rather, it is based on feelings of pleasure or displeasure that are not dependent on the existence of the object. That is not to say that the person who is looking at a painting, for instance, will be indifferent to the picture going up in flames, but that the pleasure that they obtain from contemplating it is not dependent on its existence, nor is the judgment that it is beautiful.

Kant does not only rely on the criterion of disinterest to make the distinction between pure judgments of taste and judgments of agreeableness. He has another one at his disposal, one which relies on the distinction between form and matter. Kant writes: "In painting, sculpture and in fact in all the formative arts, in architecture and horticulture, so far as fine arts, the *design* is what is essential. Here it is not what gratifies in sensation but what merely pleases by its form, that is the fundamental prerequisite for taste. The colours which give brilliancy to the sketch are part of the charm. They may no doubt, in their own way, enliven the object for sensation, but make it really worth looking at and beautiful they

cannot.”<sup>1</sup> This distinction does not turn on the notion of interest, but Kant demands that only delight in the form is disinterested delight; the delight one takes in each colour (as opposed, one must believe, to the tonal relations between colours in a painting or sculpture) is an interested matter: delight taken in that which merely gratifies (the agreeable) is interest.

There are two possible objections to the use of form by Kant to provide a criterion to distinguish pure judgments of taste from other judgments that are grounded in pleasure or displeasure. The first would be to demonstrate that disinterested pleasures are not always ones taken in the form of an object. The second would be to demonstrate that Kant is wrong in his classification of form and matter. These objections would clearly have ramifications for Kant’s criterial use of form to distinguish pleasure taken in the beautiful from pleasure taken in the agreeable.

We will consider these objections at greater length later in the thesis. But, for the time being, it is worth noting that Kant takes disinterested pleasure to be delight in the form of an object and, furthermore, that that delight prompts a judgment of taste which commands universal assent. By contrast, delight taken in a simple secondary quality (such as taste, smell or colour) - the delight that is not taken in the form of an object - makes no such command since, Kant argues, it is based on a private feeling. Kant writes: “Thus he does not take it amiss if, when he says that Canary-wine is agreeable, another corrects the expression and reminds him that he ought to say: It is agreeable *to me*. This applies not only to the taste of the tongue, the palate, and the throat, but to what may with any one be agreeable to eye or ear.”<sup>2</sup> This remark indicates that, for Kant, agreeable pleasures do not stem from the delight one experiences in contemplating the form of an object, but from sensuous pleasures that are taken to be private.



ii) Why must a judgment of taste be independent of all interest?

Kant writes in section 2 of the Analytic of the Beautiful that the judgment of taste is independent of all interest. He offers some examples of grounds that are inappropriate to support a judgment of taste. Here, Kant is maintaining that if one had an interest in bringing a state of affairs or an object into being and that explained one's delight once it was brought into being, and that delight provided a ground for one's favourable judgment, then one's judgment would be interested and thus not a genuine judgment of taste. For Kant, the case of judgments of taste is parallel to moral judgments: in making a decision on the morally right course of action, I do not consult my desires or interests, for to do so would be to subject myself to the causality of nature, and thus to make my moral judgment heteronomous rather than an expression of the autonomy of my will. In the case of judgments of taste, they cannot be grounded on interest or desires since one would then be predisposed in favour of those objects which one judged before the judgment was made. One would be contemplating such objects for their fittingness to serve ends which one sought; and to do so would be to judge their goodness relative to an end, rather than whether they were beautiful.

Kant insists that only pleasures that are properly disinterested can ground judgments of taste. As a result, we shall consider the examples Kant offers in section 2 at some length, because there he rules out some kinds of pleasure as being inappropriate to ground the genuine judgment of taste. One of the ramifications of Kant's distinctions between improper and proper pleasures, as we shall see, is that many critical judgments that we do make on works of art or natural beauty are deemed by Kant to be improper since they are grounded on interested feelings of

pleasure or displeasure.

Kant writes: “If any one asks me whether I consider that the palace I see before me is beautiful, I may, perhaps, reply that I do not care for things of that sort that are merely made to be gaped at. Or I may reply in the same strain as that Iroquois sachem who said that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the eating-houses. I may even go a step further and inveigh with the vigour of a *Rousseau* against the vanity of the great who spend the sweat of the people on such superfluous things. Or, in fine, I may quite easily persuade myself that if I found myself on an uninhabited island, without hope of ever coming again among men and could conjure such a palace into existence by a mere wish, I should still not trouble to do so, so long as I had a hut there that was comfortable enough for me. All this may be admitted and approved; only it is not the point at issue.”<sup>3</sup>

In the next four sections (sections a) to d)), we will consider these examples in turn.

#### a) The irrelevance of function

In the first quoted sentence, Kant is ruling out the possibility that a judgment of taste can proceed from having a predisposition against things that are made for no functional purpose. Furthermore, the point is not to do with the ontological status of the object, but with the kind of reasons that can be used to support a judgment of taste. The person who makes the kind of judgment referred to in the first sentence is likely to have a less than rich aesthetic life, but that person’s reasons for passing unfavourable judgment on the palace will not be to do with questions of taste. The first quoted sentence also concerns the kind of pleasures that are relevant to the judgment of taste: if one does not care for a palace because of contempt for non-functional objects (i.e. objects that are

constructed for the sake of contemplation or which lend themselves to contemplation), one's unfavourable judgment is not disinterestedly grounded; it is interestedly grounded in that it stems from a prejudice against objects designed for contemplation. Kant insists that the disinterested pleasure that one takes in beautiful things is immediate - i.e. that the pleasure is not mediated by considerations other than the object's form. That is to say, the person's unwillingness or inability to respond to the palace as an aesthetic object, is prompted by a prejudice against aesthetic objects.

If Kant is arguing here that the person making the judgment is inferring from past experience of objects that are designed only for contemplation that there is a lawlike connection between his failure to feel pleasure and his experience of such objects, his argument says little: this is a theory that will be falsified or confirmed by future experience. It may be rational for such a person not to cultivate their taste or to expose themselves to experiences of such beautiful objects, but that reason is not relevant to supporting a judgment of taste.

If, however, Kant is making the point that those who are prejudiced against objects that are made for no functional purpose (or have an incentive to find them displeasing because they are not made for a functional purpose) cannot make proper judgments of taste because their judgment is infected with an unwarranted interest, then his argument deserves closer consideration.

Consider, for example, a novel such as Hard Times, to which someone who was prejudiced against contemplative objects or works of art may be drawn because of its polemical power in bringing to light the injustices of Victorian society. The aesthetic attitude of such a person to this book is interested, but that does not mean that the pleasure they experience need be interested, nor

that their judgments need be so. The pleasure may be disinterested because the power of the novel may be such as to overwhelm the person's prejudice against contemplative works of art. But its success as a work of art cannot depend on its success as a political polemic. In Kant's terms, for it to do so, would introduce the concept of goodness relative to an end, and judging something according to that concept would not be a pure judgment of taste. Rather, it would be a dependent judgment of beauty, which is distinguished from a free judgment of beauty, in that its utility or excellence relative to a concept of its perfection is presupposed in the judgment.

But this example would not tell against Kant's example: there he is stipulating that if the sole grounds for a putative judgment of taste on a palace are to do with the function of that palace, that judgment will be partial and thus not a proper judgment of taste.

This may seem like an obvious matter, but there are books devoted to denying that Kant is right in insisting that considerations of the external objective finality of an object cannot ground a judgment of taste. Thus, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who, in his study Distinction, develops "an anti-Kantian aesthetic", contrasts the propositions of the Analytic of the Beautiful with a "popular aesthetic". He writes: "Working class people, who expect every image to fulfil a function, if only that of a sign, refer, often explicitly, to norms of morality or agreeableness in all their judgments. Thus the photograph of a dead soldier provokes judgments which, whether positive or negative, are always responses to the reality of the thing represented or to the functions the representation could serve, the horror of war or the denunciation of the horrors of war which the photographer is supposed to produce simply by showing that horror."<sup>4</sup>

A Kantian need not disagree with any aspect of the foregoing

quotation (although anyone might find objectionable its presumption that all working class people “expect every image to fulfil a function”): these are all proper judgments, but they are not judgments of taste. If what Bourdieu means when he refers to responses to the photograph’s “reality” is that the photograph is not so much taken as a representation of a scene, but is taken (or, rather, mistaken) for the scene itself, then that response does not ground a judgment of taste. If the response is to the photograph’s success as a representation, that would ground a judgment about the efficacy of that photograph in representing a real scene and is therefore a judgment which presupposes the concept of an end that defines what the thing has to be, and consequently the concept of perfection. This judgment, if grounded in disinterested delight, would be a dependent judgment of taste.

By contrast, the responses to the photograph that prompt judgments about the function of that representation would be responses that may be interested (one person may find the photograph pleasing because he can see that it will help him in his anti-war campaigning) or disinterested (another may readily see how the photograph would help in an anti-war campaign, but nonetheless judges the photograph relative to the success of fulfilling that end without having views on whether that end is right or wrong - i.e without that judgment being grounded in an interest). In neither case would the judgment prompted by such responses be a pure judgment of taste, since they are not grounded in contemplation of the photograph’s form. Nor are they impure (dependent) judgments of taste, since they are concerned exclusively with how good the photographs are at serving the ends for which they were designed. Under any interpretation of what a judgment of dependent beauty consists of (see the discussion of these interpretations in the previous chapter), such a judgment is

concerned with more than utility.

But a Kantian would object when Bourdieu goes on to decide that such judgments are properly “working class aesthetics”, and that such aesthetics are preferable to what he calls “Kantian aesthetics”. (Bourdieu adds: “In contrast to this decadent art cut off from social life, respecting neither God nor man, an art worthy of the name must be subordinated to science morality and justice. It must aim to arouse the moral sense, to inspire feelings of dignity and delicacy, to idealise reality, to substitute for the thing the ideal of the thing, by painting the true and not the real. In a word, it must educate.”<sup>5</sup>) For these judgments are not judgments of taste, but rather judgments about the fittingness of works of art to serve particular functions. For that reason, such “working class aesthetics” would consist of judgments that works of art are good for certain ends, rather than judgments that works of art are beautiful. Such aesthetics would fail to capture what is specific about art or what makes its value different from other works, objects or actions that may help in education. That is not to say that it is not proper for works of art to serve social functions, but that to judge works of art according to how well they serve that function will not be to judge them as beautiful objects.

In the first quoted sentence, then, Kant is making the point that judgments of taste cannot be grounded on the utility or fittingness of an object or action in serving an end. Critiques of Kant such as Bourdieu’s fall prey to that point. Bourdieu offers much data to suggest it is true that working class people judge works of art according to their utility. That can be admitted and approved: only such judgments are not judgments of taste.

#### b) The irrelevance of sensual pleasure

The second quoted sentence, about the Iroquois *sachem*, seems

susceptible to several different interpretations. Initially, it appears to be used by Kant to demonstrate the superiority of the disinterested pleasures taken in the beautiful to the interested pleasures taken in the agreeable. The *sachem* seems absurd for preferring eating-houses to the other pleasures - paintings, music, literature - that Paris has to offer. This interpretation of the use of the second quoted sentence in Kant's argument, however, is untenable. Kant is not arguing that an interested pleasure is inferior to a disinterested one. He is arguing that one's preference for such interested pleasures as gastronomy may not be used as a reason for judging a beautiful object, in this case a palace, unfavourably. This point can be established because, in the last sentence of the quoted passage, Kant says of all the judgments he considers that they can be approved. That remark bears on the *sachem's* views as follows: Kant is not condemning the *sachem's* preference for gastronomic pleasures over contemplative pleasures, but he is arguing that that preference cannot be used as a justification for an unfavourable judgment on the beauty of the palace. That is because a judgment of taste cannot be tinged with interest in Kant's view.

The second quoted sentence may be interpreted as making the point that one who prefers sensual pleasures to contemplative ones is not likely to have refined taste: if one prefers food to art, then one's judgments of taste are likely to be unsophisticated. Again, Kant is not making this point: although it may be true to say that a person's taste may be less sophisticated than another's because he prefers sensual to contemplative pleasures, he may nonetheless be capable of making a genuine judgment of taste. The *sachem*, however, does not make a genuine judgment of taste in the second quoted sentence.

Guyer suggests that Kant is making the following point in the

second quoted sentence: “Preferring a restaurant to the palace expresses a judgment not on the representations of the two places, but on the sensual pleasures to be derived from interactions going beyond mere perception - namely, the pleasures to be had in actually eating in one place or the other.”<sup>6</sup> But this interpretation is not convincing: the *sachem* is not so much comparing opportunities for gastronomy and choosing in favour of eating-houses, as he is declaring a preference for the pleasures of food over any other pleasures that Paris has to offer, not least that of contemplating beautiful objects. If he were comparing opportunities for gastronomy, it is true, his resulting judgment would not be a judgment of taste, nor could it be used to support one. But that is not the point Kant is making.

Kant is arguing that a preference for food over objects of beauty can be “admitted and approved” but that preference cannot be used to support a judgment of taste. This is not the same point as Kant makes when he considers the distinctions between the agreeable and the beautiful in sections 3 and 7, where he claims that sensual pleasure is private and interested and thus cannot ground the genuine judgment of taste. But it is allied to that point, for Kant, in the example of the *sachem*, does not want to allow that *preferences* for sensual pleasures rather than sensual pleasures themselves can ground judgments of taste. However, that would be a strange position to hold: even if one did hold that sensual pleasures were proper grounds of the genuine judgment of taste, or if one preferred such pleasures to contemplative ones, these views would not commit one to the very dubious thesis that preferences for such pleasures could lead one to ground all one’s judgments of taste in such preferences.



### c) The irrelevance of political or moral views

In the third quoted sentence, Kant effectively rules out another class of reasons for passing judgment on the palace as irrelevant to the question of its beauty, namely those concerned with the rights and wrongs of how the palace came to be built. Kant argues that if one's reaction to a beautiful object is solely grounded by one's political or moral opinions, that reaction will not be disinterested and, for that reason, it will not give rise to a genuine judgment of taste. If Kant's position is acceptable, then it offers a radical critique of what passes for artistic criticism, since critical evaluation of works of art often allows such principles to influence the judgment of a work's beauty. However, Kant is stipulating in this quoted sentence that such principles can only ground interested judgments. But what is Kant's support for making such a stipulation? In section 2, he writes: "Every one must allow that a judgment on the beautiful which is tinged with the slightest interest, is very partial and not a pure judgment of taste."<sup>7</sup> His exhortation here is not based on argument but on appeal to a common intuition: it would be absurd to suggest that a work of art or something designed to be an object of pleasurable contemplation is ugly *because* of the conditions in which it was produced. Considering the exploitation of the workers who built the palace can only blind us to the beauty of the building.

### d) The relevance of society

In the fourth quoted sentence, Kant could be interpreted as making the innocent and uncontroversial point that if you are concerned with comfort, you will not be concerned with beauty. Or, more exactly: that if you are concerned with comfort then such concerns cannot ground a judgment of taste.

But Kant could also be interpreted here as suggesting that

without society one would not be tempted to cultivate taste. This interpretation is plausible, not least because a nearby footnote includes the remark “only in society is it *interesting* to have taste”<sup>8</sup> The suggestion is far from obvious: why would a person living outside of society, with no prospect of reentering it, not attempt to construct beautiful things which have no functional purpose? Further, are we to suppose that a person in such a predicament would not contemplate pleasurable the island’s natural beauties just because they were not in society and had no prospect of returning to it?

The plausibility of this second interpretation of the sentence gains ground when one considers that it prefigures Kant’s discussion of the empirical interest in the beautiful in the Analytic of the Sublime, where he traces the history of humanity as it emerges into a civilised state, one where the universal communicability of judgments of taste promotes sociability. “Only in society does it occur to him to be not merely a man, but a man refined after the manner of his kind, (the beginning of civilisation) - for that is the estimate formed of one who has the bent and turn for communicating his pleasure to others, and who is not quite satisfied with an Object unless his feeling of delight in it can be shared in communion with others.”<sup>9</sup> But, while it may be true that the cultivation of taste thrives in society, it is by no means essential to it. Kant’s argument in this section seems at best speculative and at worst dubious. It is true that it is an empirical, contingent matter as to whether one would cultivate taste outside society, but there is no evidence for Kant’s claim and intuition suggests otherwise.

### iii) Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered in detail Kant's examples of some kinds of reasons that are inappropriate to support genuine judgments of taste. But how is each example bound up with the role of disinterestedness? In the first example, the judgment that one does not care for things made to be gaped at need not be interested, but nonetheless it is not a judgment of taste, since it is grounded in the concept of an end, i.e. that all things should be designed to serve ends. One could make a disinterested judgment of goodness on the palace, appreciating that it well served its end of providing a sumptuous home for a royal family; or one could make an interested judgment of goodness, appreciating as a member of that royal family that such a home fulfilled one's interest in living in a sumptuous palace. But such judgments would neither be free judgments of beauty, for they concern delight taken in the contemplated form of objects or actions, nor dependent judgments of beauty, because they concern judging objects or actions relative to concepts of perfection.

In the second example, about the Iroquois *sachem*, Kant is arguing that a proper ground for a judgment of taste cannot be a preference for food over beautiful objects. As he argues elsewhere that food and drink merely gratify, that is they prompt agreeable pleasures, then the thesis he advances here is that they are interested pleasures and thus cannot ground the judgment of taste, which can only be grounded in disinterested pleasure. This is a questionable thesis that we will consider at greater length in the next chapter.

In the third example, Kant is insisting that the interested anger which one might feel at the exploitation of workers is not a proper ground of the judgment of taste.

The fourth example bears on the question of disinterestedness

in that outside society one would not cultivate taste; it is only through the empirical interest in the beautiful, an incentive which stems from a basic human drive towards sociability, that one makes judgments of taste. The possibility that someone would live outside society and would not cultivate taste has no bearing on whether those of us in society make genuine judgments of taste. But need that empirical interest stem, or stem solely, from a drive towards sociability? Perhaps it could stem from a spiritual need which is not dependent on sociability. But, again, such a supposition would be speculative. In either case, it would take good arguments to explain that need to cultivate taste in a way that does not infringe the disinterestedness criterion of the judgment of taste. We shall consider such arguments later in the thesis when we assess Anthony Savile's third way of forging the connection between disinterested judgments of taste and our spiritual need for cultivating taste.

Notes on Chapter 3

1. Kant, op. cit., p.67.
2. Ibid., p.51.
3. Ibid., p.43.
4. Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste, (Routledge, 1979), p.41.
5. Ibid., p.49.
6. Guyer, op. cit., p.197.
7. Kant., op. cit., p.43.
8. Ibid., footnote p.44.
9. Ibid., p.155

## Chapter 4: The Agreeable and the Beautiful

### i) Kant's distinctions between the Agreeable and the Beautiful

The distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful is important for Kant because he wants to perspicuously expose the character of the judgment of taste and show that, while it is grounded in subjectively experienced delight, it can legitimately claim to be valid for others than those who experience it and, moreover, constitute at least an invitation and at most a demand to experience the same delight when suitably exposed to the work in question. Kant wants to show that the judgment that a thing is agreeable, by contrast, is grounded in subjectively experienced delight, but shares none of the other characteristics of the judgment of taste mentioned in the last sentence. Furthermore, Kant holds that the subjectively experienced delight is of a different character from that of the delight that grounds the judgment of taste. That is not to say that the feelings of pleasure will be qualitatively different in each case; rather, Kant's threefold distinction of pleasures taken in the agreeable, the good and the beautiful concern "three different relations of representations to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, in relation to which we differentiate objects."<sup>1</sup> The pleasure one takes in a thing that is agreeable, Kant argues, has a different relation to that representation than the judgment of taste. Kant makes the distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable with reference to the notions of interest, universality, finality of form and necessity - none of which, I will claim, is made plausibly. In this chapter, I shall consider only the first three notions, reserving discussion of the criterial role of necessity for genuine judgments of taste until chapter 6.

## ii) Interest

In the Moment of Quality in the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant distinguishes the beautiful from the agreeable in terms of interest. A judgment that something is beautiful and a judgment that something is agreeable share subjective basis and are singular: they are based on feelings of immediate delight or aversion. They differ, so Kant claims, in that the pleasure one experiences when one judges something to be agreeable is always interested; a genuine judgment of taste is grounded in disinterested pleasure or displeasure. As we saw in Chapter 3, problems arise if we define interest in the way that Kant does in the Moment of Quality of the Analytic of the Beautiful. But, even if we define it in accord with the definition of interest from Kant's moral philosophy, as Guyer recommends, can the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful be made plausibly in these terms? In that chapter, we saw that a better definition of interest was "that by which reason becomes practical, i.e., a cause determining the will", and this at least conforms with Kant's analysis in section 3 (where he argues that delight in the agreeable is coupled with interest), since in this section Kant argues: "Now, that a judgment on an object by which its agreeableness is affirmed, expresses an interest in it, is evident from the fact that through sensation it provokes a desire for similar objects."<sup>2</sup> For the cause determining the will in this case is the desire for similar objects - bars of chocolate, glasses of wine etc.. The delight one takes in eating a bar of chocolate is interested in that it is the fulfilment of a desire and it is that fulfilment that explains the pleasure; but this delight stimulates further desires for chocolate. Kant does not argue here that once one has eaten one bar of chocolate, that prompts a desire to eat another bar of chocolate immediately afterwards, then another, then another; but rather that insofar as one has a later desire for chocolate, that can

be explained by reference to the delight one took in the previous chocolate.

But is Kant's thesis, that one's desire for agreeable objects can sometimes be explained by reference to earlier delight taken in similar objects, not also true of a judgment of taste? Guyer writes: "It appears to be a defining characteristic of any kind of pleasure that it produce an interest in its own continuation, and this makes the distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable obscure indeed."<sup>3</sup> If one is enjoying looking at a painting, then one's pleasure (disinterested though it is) is likely to supply an incentive, a reason for continuing to look at the painting, or to look at it at some later date.

But surely Kant answers this point, when he writes in the footnote that we have already had occasion to quote: "A judgment upon an object of our delight may be wholly *disinterested* but withal very *interesting*, i.e. it relies on no interest, but it produces one. Of this kind are all pure moral judgments. But, of themselves, judgments of taste do not even set up any interest whatsoever. Only in society is it *interesting* to have taste."<sup>4</sup> The point that is being made here is that the judgment of taste must be grounded in disinterested delight, but that delight may well produce an interest in ensuring the continued existence of objects that we have judged to be beautiful. There is no conflict here in asserting that the disinterested delight proper to the contemplation of The Last Supper is not taken in the existence of that painting but rather is the result of contemplating its form, and that delight prompts one to have an interest in maintaining the painting. Guyer writes: "The beauty of irreplaceable masterpieces like [sic] the Parthenon or The Last Supper seems to provide very good reason indeed for even strenuous and expensive efforts for the continued existence of these objects."<sup>5</sup> This view, despite what Guyer contends, is perfectly



compatible with Kant's views, as the quoted footnote demonstrates. It is important to note, however, that it is trivially true that the painting needs to exist for a spectator to be disinterestedly delighted by the painting's form in the way that grounds the judgment of taste (although the disinterested delight cannot be at the existence of the object); the interest that such experiences produce give the will reason to maintain the painting in a fit state for such disinterestedly pleasurable contemplation in future. "The strenuous and expensive efforts" to which Guyer refers indicate how valuable we find those experiences of disinterested delight that ground the judgment of taste.

The last sentence of the quoted footnote does not contradict Kant's insistence that the delight that one takes in the beautiful is properly disinterested either. For, even if one has an interest in cultivating taste, an interest that is prompted by a basic human drive towards sociability, that interest cannot be part of the determining grounds of the genuine judgment of taste. However, that thesis needs to be argued for as it is not obvious: if one exposes oneself to beautiful paintings, for instance, not because one values paintings in themselves, but because it satisfies an interest that arises because one values sociability, then surely any judgments of taste that one makes on these paintings will be improperly interested. But this need not be the case: one may go to an art gallery because of an interest in sociability, but the delight that one experiences when one looks at the paintings need not be grounded in that interest, nor could it be if that delight was to ground the genuine judgment of taste.

In the case of the agreeable, Kant must assert if he is to be consistent with his general position in the Analytic of the Beautiful, that the interest produced by the delight at appreciating a thing that gratifies is produced by and concerned with producing only

interested pleasures. This assertion, though, waits on a satisfactory argument for the view that all agreeable pleasures are interested ones.

To support that argument, Kant writes: “So far as the interest of inclination in the case of the agreeable goes, every one says: Hunger is the best sauce; and people with a healthy appetite relish everything, so long as it is something they can eat. Such delight, consequently, gives no indication of taste having anything to say in the choice. Only when men have got all they want can we tell who among them has taste.”<sup>6</sup> This quotation could be interpreted as saying that all pleasures that one takes in agreeable objects are interested. If so, then the argument is contestable. Hunger is the best sauce only if one is hungry - it is necessary for one to be hungry for hunger to be the best sauce, but not sufficient: one can be hungry and still take a delight in the quality of food or drink - that is not dependent on one’s desire to fulfil the interest one has in satisfying one’s hunger. That is to say, the interest one has in satisfying one’s hunger has no causal-functional role in the delight one experiences in eating the food. Furthermore, if one is not hungry, then Bearnaise or hollandaise etc., may be considered the best sauces: there is a contemplative, disinterested pleasure that one may take in food or drink which is parallel to the pleasure that one takes in beautiful things.

The second interpretation of the quotation is that not all delight in the agreeable is interested. This interpretation focuses on the first sentence where there is an ambiguity: if we took that as our guide to the agreeable, then one way of taking the sentence would be that the interest of inclination need not always be present in the case of the agreeable - otherwise why did Kant bother qualifying the agreeable in this way? Why not say “So far as the case of the agreeable goes . . .”? However, to interpret the first sentence in this

way would be to ignore the thrust of the rest of the first moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful, where Kant insists that the agreeable is coupled with an interest. But, the last sentence of the above quotation does give support to the second interpretation. For the implication there is that once one's hunger has been satisfied then one can exhibit one's taste by disinterestedly appreciating the food and by making judgments of taste about it.

Kant makes his point badly in this quotation. He need not maintain the (dubious) empirical view that one's desires need to be fulfilled *before* one can take disinterested delight in food or drink. (Indeed, the opposite of what Kant suggests in the last sentence of the quotation *may* be true: hunger or thirst may act as spurs to taking disinterested pleasure in food or drink - although in such cases, the *desire* for satisfying one's hunger or quenching one's thirst could not be used in an explanation of one's disinterested delight; rather, it could turn out to be a physiological fact that one would be more likely to appreciate food or drink if one was hungry or thirsty.) Rather, he needs to make the point that if an interest (such as satisfying one's hunger) is operative in grounding the judgment of taste, then that judgment is not a genuine judgment of taste but a judgment of sense (one that is grounded on one's personal interest in satisfying a desire).

Nonetheless, the interesting aspect of this quotation is that it seems to offer scope for the view that taste can be exhibited in making judgments about food and drink. That is, Kant seems to be advancing the thesis of our second interpretation of the quoted remark. This is an appealing thesis, since it helps explain our interests in gastronomy or wine tasting, whereas in other remarks in the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant seems to suggest that the delight that one takes in such sensuous pleasures is always interested and is capable of grounding only a judgment of sense

rather than a judgment of taste. If that suggestion were plausible, one means of making the desired distinction between gastronomic pleasures and appetitive ones would be ruled out: the former kind of pleasure would be just as appetitive as pleasures taken in satisfying hunger or quenching thirst.

Elsewhere, then, Kant seems to assert that pleasures taken in sensuous objects are always interested. Thus, in the second moment, Kant makes the point that one who judges that a canary-wine is agreeable judges it that way because of a private delight. Such a delight is necessarily interested, because disinterested delight is (as we shall see in the next section) thought of by Kant to be universally communicable; private delight must be interested since it cannot be communicable, and its communicability is a criterion for deciding whether a pleasure is interested or not. To support the view that one who judges a canary-wine to be beautiful will not “take it amiss if . . . another corrects the expression and reminds him that he ought to say: It is agreeable *to me*”<sup>7</sup>, Kant needs to demonstrate that in such a case the pleasure one derives from drinking the canary-wine is a delight grounded in an interest that one has in consuming the wine. But that is not always going to be something that can be demonstrated. True, if the person making the judgment does so because the canary-wine quenches his thirst or satisfies his appetite for wine, then his pleasure will be related to the fulfilment of his personal desire and, therefore, he will not take it amiss if he is so corrected. But this is not always the case. One may drink the wine and find that it delights, but not because it satisfies an appetite; rather, it delights because it tastes pleasant. Of course, one may expect it to taste pleasant and that expectation may well give one an interest in tasting that wine, but that interest need not be involved in grounding the judgment about the wine. In

that case, the wine delights disinterestedly.

But this is just what Kant appears to deny in this quotation, and yet allow in the earlier quotation (where he said that only when hunger has been satisfied can it be determined which people in a crowd have taste). When writing about the agreeableness of canary-wine, he does not seem prepared to allow that the wine can delight disinterestedly. However, his commitment to this view cannot stem from the assertion that no pleasures taken in one's sensual states can delight disinterestedly, because some pleasures can delight in that way, for example, those that are not grounded in one's desire to satisfy one's hunger in the case of food, or to quench one's thirst in the case of drink. Rather, his commitment to this view would seem to stem from his conviction that pleasures taken in one's sensuous states are not communicable and are thus private. Furthermore, they are private because, Kant supposes, they are not formal: pleasures that we take in beautiful objects that exhibit appealing forms can be communicated, whereas Kant insists that the pleasures that we take in the agreeable are not formal and so cannot be communicated. We shall consider the justifications for these two convictions in the next two sections of this chapter.

First, though, let us assess whether Kant's generally maintained position - that appetites will explain pleasure in one's own sensuous states but not in such things as elegant forms - is plausible. We have already argued for the view that interests are not always operative in grounding judgments about food and drink. But could not Kant reply, say, in the case of wine-tasting, that one's pleasure is always appetitive, that is, it is always grounded in an interest, so that one can never make a judgment of taste about a wine, only one of sense? Thus, when one has a desire to taste a glass of Chateauneuf-du-Pape, one's pleasure in the wine is always grounded in the interest that led one to desire to drink it.

Sometimes, of course, that will be the case, but not always. The case is parallel to the case where one has an interest in contemplating The Last Supper because one knows that one felt disinterested pleasure earlier. Of course, one will have an interest in contemplating that painting, but if one's delight in contemplating the painting is disinterested, that pleasure cannot be based on the interest. Similarly, one may drink wine because one expects to take pleasure in it, but one's pleasure could still be disinterested because the pleasure one takes is not taken in the fulfilment of that expectation or interest, but in the wine; in that case such pleasure would properly ground the genuine judgment of taste.

How far can the parallel between such reflective, disinterested judgments on food and wine and reflective, disinterested judgments on beautiful things be pressed? Clearly, the former cannot be a sub-class of the latter, for one is unlikely to make the judgment that a sauce or a wine is beautiful. But while it would be implausible to say that such judgments are judgments of beauty, they may be genuine judgments of taste. We can take support for this view from Kant's expressed view that once hunger has been satisfied then questions of taste with regard to food can be addressed, and from the fact that we have argued that there can be non-appetitive sensual pleasures and thus disinterested judgments on such pleasures. But, if this view is to be shown to be conclusive, then we must assess whether such judgments meet the other criteria for genuine judgments of taste - universality, finality of form and necessity. We shall do this in the next two sections and in the next chapter.

### iii) Universality

In the Moment of Quantity of the Analytic of the Beautiful Kant argues that the disinterested pleasure that is one of the hallmarks

of our delight in the beautiful is communicable. By contrast, the pleasures taken in the agreeable are private. Kant believes he has shown, with the example of the appreciation of canary-wine considered above, that sensations are not communicable.

Kant returns to the point in section 39, where he writes: “Thus a person who is without a sense of smell cannot have a sensation of this kind communicated to him, and, even, if he does not suffer from this deficiency, we still cannot be certain he gets precisely the same sensation from a flower that we got from it.”<sup>8</sup> Guyer embellishes this point: “ ‘Sensory feeling’, or the sensation of colour, sound, and the like, depends entirely upon our physiological response to objects, and cannot be considered universally communicable because we have no *a priori* basis for a belief that ‘everyone has a like sense to our own’. *A fortiori*, the pleasures of agreeableness, or pleasures due merely to the character of the sensation caused by an object of sense, cannot be rationally expected of everyone.”<sup>9</sup> The same, Kant argues, is not true of the disinterested pleasures we take in beautiful objects. For in that case, the imagination and the understanding intervene to force a public character on the perception; while in the case of the agreeable, the privacy of pleasure is shown by the fact that only the passive cognitive power, the sensibility, is involved. Guyer does not need to show that there are actual differences in our physiologies; rather, it is enough to show that we have no grounds for supposing that there are common physiologies. That does not mean that we conduct an investigation to show that physiologies differ (and that, as a result, predilections for simple sensations will differ too), but that we cannot assume physiologies to be the same. In the case of the beautiful, by contrast, there is an *a priori* assumption that judges of taste are similarly constituted - without that *a priori* assumption, Kant’s transcendental deduction would fail.

It is important to note that in this section we are considering simple sensations, so Guyer's argument may well not affect the view that the pleasures we take in gastronomy and wine-tasting, for example, are disinterested because, as we will argue in the next section, those pleasures can be taken in the contemplated form of food and wine.

McCloskey argues, with Kant, that the objects of agreeable pleasure are necessarily private. She writes: "If what I am enjoying in eating oysters is the oysters slipping down my throat, even if you are simultaneously eating your oysters and enjoying your oysters slipping down *your* throat, then the object of my enjoyment is of necessity not the same as yours."<sup>10</sup> This is a stronger point than Guyer's. It is not so much the possibility that the experience of sensations may vary from subject to subject that McCloskey considers, but that the objects of such sensual pleasure are by definition different for each subject. Thus, there is a crucial difference in the object of the pleasure that we take in this kind of agreeable object and the pleasure that we take in the beautiful. That is, for example, the object of my enjoyment when I eat oysters is not so much the oysters themselves as the pleasurable sensation of eating oysters, a pleasurable sensation that is specific to me and in that sense private. In the case of the beautiful, by contrast, when two people take delight in the same beautiful painting, the object of their enjoyment is public and, because of that, the pleasures are communicable, even though those pleasures are subjectively experienced.

Kant links this point to his explanation of the properly aesthetic response - which he accounts for in terms of the harmony of the faculties of imagination and understanding - as follows: "For the ground of this pleasure is found in the universal, though subjective, condition of reflective judgments, namely the final



harmony of an object . . . with the mutual relation of the faculties of cognition (imagination and understanding), which are requisite for every empirical cognition.”<sup>11</sup>

However, in the case of agreeable pleasures, the object of my delight need not always be private in the sense discussed by McCloskey. For, what I enjoy about the wine may not be it slipping down my throat, but its taste, its bouquet and other publicly observable qualities. She recognises this, for that is the force of her statement “If what I am enjoying about the oysters . . .”: one way of enjoying eating oysters is to enjoy them slipping down one’s throat, but that is not the only way. If what I enjoy is the flavour and the texture of the oysters as they slip down my throat, then what I am enjoying is the oysters rather than the fact that they are slipping down my throat. In this case, the object of my delight is not private. If what I enjoy is the pleasurable interplay between the taste of the wine, the taste of the oysters, their texture, and the smell and taste of the rest of the meal, however, I am enjoying an object which is as observable as a painting.

Are not such pleasures capable of being communicable and hence universal? To be consistent with Kant, one would have to argue that this is not possible. To see why let us reconsider the quotation above, where Kant argued that the sensation of a smell could not be communicated to one who had no sense of smell. If someone has no sense of taste or smell, then their appreciation of oysters will be limited, and so will their appreciation of the gastronomic delights of the last sentence of the previous paragraph. But that does not mean that the pleasure cannot be communicated to them: it could be described in metaphors which convey a sense of what the pleasure of eating a fine meal is like (“the wine was as smooth as silk” etc.).

But mere communicability is not the issue. Even the person

without a sense of smell could have something of that experience conveyed to them by means of metaphorical description. Kant is concerned that the pleasure one takes in an object must be the ground of possibility for everyone; only then is such a pleasurable experience one that can ground a judgment of taste. His contention is that if the object of one's pleasure is private, then, that pleasure cannot be the ground of a judgment of taste. No one apart from me can have the pleasurable experience of oysters slipping down *my* throat, and so no one but me can make a judgment about it. But that judgment will have to be a judgment of sense since the pleasure is private in the sense that it cannot be experienced by anyone else.

There is another possibility in the case of agreeable pleasures. Furthermore, this is the kind of possibility that Kant is most concerned with in forging his distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable in terms of universality. If I drink some Canary-wine and pronounce it to be agreeable, but everyone else finds it revolting, then the object of the pleasure and displeasure of those who have drunk the Canary-wine will be the same, but my response will be different because of the differences in my physiological make-up from everyone else's. What I enjoy is specific to me, at least in the case of this Canary-wine. In such cases, we can allow that the pleasure I experience is not capable of being the ground of possible experience for everyone else, since it is specific to my physiological make-up. But the possibility of my judgment on a Canary-wine conflicting with everyone else's does not mean that all pleasures that people take in agreeable objects will be private. If there is enough similarity in the physiological make-ups of people who take an agreeable delight in an object, then there is a possibility of universal agreement in judgments of taste about it. But that agreement will be accidental, or fortuitous, that is not

compelled by any necessity. It will be due to the accidental fact that physiological natures converge. For that reason it will not be a judgment of taste on the beautiful.

Kant needed to show that all pleasures taken in the agreeable, under whose head he includes sensual pleasures, can only be taken by the person experiencing them. But this is an impossible demand that Kant has imposed on himself. As Savile writes: "But the agreeable is not just as Kant supposes - there is a difference between the wine being agreeable and its being found to be so by me, to which Kant seems insensitive where sensitivity, one might think, would provide him with better ground for insisting on the universality of beauty's demand."<sup>12</sup> Savile, in a later book, asserts: "Plainly there are non-beautiful things that we find agreeable independently of their satisfying particular desires or interests that we have, and there is no obvious incoherence in supposing that, in certain circumstances, some such object might be regarded with universal delight. It would not on that account be beautiful."<sup>13</sup> If disinterestedness and universality are insufficient to help Kant make the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful, and form, as we will argue in the next section, does not help in this regard either, then Kant will have to rely on his fourth distinguishing characteristic, necessity, to make the distinction. We shall consider its role in the next chapter.

#### iv) Form

In the moment of relation in the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant insists that the pleasure we take in the beautiful object is in its form. At the start of the previous chapter, we considered that there might be two objections to the use of form by Kant to provide a criterion to distinguish pure judgments of taste from other judgments of agreeableness. The first was to demonstrate that

disinterested pleasures are not always ones taken in the form of an object. This involves arguing that there are pleasures that one can experience that are not interested, thus which are not appetitive, but which are not taken in the form of the object. Typical among such pleasures would be pleasures of simple sensation, such as the delight one takes in the smell of coffee, or in a soft violet colour, or in the sound of wind instruments. This, it seems, can be easily demonstrated. What needs to be shown is that there is a counter example to the thesis that all pleasures taken in simple sensations are interested. We offered a counter example of this kind in section ii) of this chapter.

The second would be to demonstrate that Kant is wrong in his classification of form and matter. These objections would clearly have ramifications for Kant's criterial use of form to distinguish pleasure taken in the beautiful from pleasure taken in the agreeable. But what if the appreciation of some sensuous states was concerned with taking a delight in the form of the object of enjoyment? This would show that the criterion of form would not work as Kant hopes to demonstrate the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful. This appreciation of form seems to be just the case when we take delight in the complementary foods and wines that contribute to making a gastronomic meal. Thus, textures of foods, differences in taste, complementary colours and so on seem to indicate that the pleasures we would take in such a meal would be, at least in part, to do with its form rather than matter (where "matter" refers to simple sensible qualities such as colours, tastes, or sounds). Similarly, if one takes delight in a wine, that delight might be grounded in appreciation of the form of the wine, the interrelations of its attack and aftertaste, how the colour reflects the bouquet etc. Of course, this would be very unusual.

When Kant writes about form, he does so in a very specific

way. For instance, when he writes about the pleasure we take in a work of art, he insists that “the finality in its form must appear just as free from the constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a product of mere nature.”<sup>14</sup> In the case of the work of art, this means that, although it has been intentionally created, that is created for an end (perhaps even the end of disinterestedly delighting an audience), there can be no consciousness of that end in the mind of the one who submits that work to a judgment of taste. This argument may be debatable, but in principle there is no reason why such intentionally produced objects of pleasure such as gastronomic meals or wines could not also exhibit such finality of form. Thus, if those people appreciating them subtract the intentions of the chef or wine-maker, just as one is encouraged by Kant to subtract the intentions of the artist in judging a work of art, then one will take pleasure, if at all, in the form of the meal or wine.

None of this is to deny that for the most part, the pleasures we call sensual are taken in simple perceptible properties. To be sure, those pleasures are not thereby interested, but nor are they akin to those of the beautiful, since they are not taken in subjective finality of form.

#### v) Harmony of the faculties

One possible reply to the thought that there are contemplative pleasures that we take in food and wine is that such pleasures are not taken in the harmony of the faculties. Kant argues that this harmony is pleasurable. This harmony consists in the free play of the imagination and understanding. It is free because no concepts are employed as they are, for example, in cases of determinant judgment. If I see a painting of a man, the marks on the canvas are seen as a unity. The unity that I perceive, and which I imaginatively take to be a man, is not a man but marks of paint. I only regard the

marks as a man, or a representation of a man, because my imagination in its free play with my understanding, brings the perception under the indeterminate idea of unity. In other words, the intuition or experience is impregnated with the concept "man". In the case of an abstract painting, I may see a pattern, but "seeing a pattern" consists in the intuition or experience being imaginatively taken as an experienced order. Only rational beings can carry out this indeterminate synthesis, and feel the pleasure that this experience of unity produces.

One may not think this pleasure that Kant supposes we take in the harmony of the faculties is a good account of the pleasure we take in many important aesthetic objects (the plays of Shakespeare, for instance), but let us neglect that point and consider whether the pleasures one takes in wine or good food can be accounted for in this way.

There are two possibilities: first, that we can account for such pleasures in this way; second, that we cannot. The problem is, if we cannot, then some clear-cut cases that Kant offers of beautiful objects cannot be accounted for in terms of the harmony of faculties either. In Kant's case of a beautiful rose, if we take the free play of the cognitive faculties to be the explanation of what affords us pleasure in the rose, then it seems that the same can be said of wine or good food. Thus, for Kant, when one judges a rose to be beautiful, it may be that one imaginatively reflects on one's experience and in that free play one experiences the rose as exhibiting a delightful form. But that delightful form is a product of one's perception, not something that as it were lies in the rose waiting to be discovered. The same, surely, could be true of a glass of wine: when one appreciates it, one savours the colour, the bouquet, the attack, the body, the aftertaste, and the pleasurable interconnections between the different aspects of the experience of

drinking the wine. One then takes the wine to exhibit a form every bit as pleasurable as that of a beautiful rose. However, we do not want to commit ourselves to the view that the wine is thereby beautiful.

#### vi) Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that three of the criteria Kant uses to distinguish between pleasures taken in the beautiful and pleasures taken in the agreeable are inadequate to serve that aim. We have argued that there are disinterested pleasures that can be taken in agreeable objects (notably some pleasures taken in food and wine); that it is possible for there to be universal agreement on pleasures taken in the agreeable, just as there can be agreement on pleasures taken in the beautiful (a point to be explained in the next chapter), and that there can be pleasures in the agreeable which are concerned with the form of finality exhibited by the objects of those pleasures. What we have not argued is that such disinterested pleasures in the agreeable ground judgments of taste in the beautiful. There is something odd in saying, in any circumstance, that a wine is beautiful. Whether this oddity can be explained in reference to the criteria Kant uses to distinguish the beautiful from the agreeable now depends on whether a compelling account of the role of necessity in forging that distinction can be given. We shall consider this issue in the next chapter.

Notes on Chapter 4

1. Kant, op. cit., p.49.
2. Ibid., p.45.
3. Guyer, op. cit., p.182.
4. Kant, op. cit., footnote pp.43-44.
5. Guyer, op. cit., p.183.
6. Kant, op. cit., pp.49-50.
7. Ibid., p.51.
8. Ibid., pp.148-149.
9. Guyer, op. cit., p.317.
10. McCloskey, op. cit., p.41.
11. Kant, op. cit., p.32.
12. Anthony Savile, Aesthetic Reconstructions (Blackwell, 1987), p.120.
13. Savile, op. cit., Kantian Aesthetics Pursued, p.22.
14. Kant, op. cit., pp.166-7.



## Chapter 5: Necessity

### i) The role of necessity in the Analytic of the Beautiful

In the last chapter, we concluded that the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful could not be satisfactorily made using the three criteria of disinterestedness, universality and finality of form. In this chapter we will consider the thought that the notion of necessity is fundamental in forging that distinction.

First, though, we must clarify which notion of necessity Kant is concerned to address in the fourth moment. Kant is not concerned with what he calls “theoretical objective necessity”: that would be improper for an analysis of judgments of taste, since such necessity would tell us that everyone *will* feel the same delight as the person making a judgment of taste. This cannot be the notion that Kant has in mind, since it would imply that the subjective basis of the judgment of taste is irrelevant: one would be able to deem something beautiful on the basis of conformity with the rule that everyone *will* feel the same delight. If it was theoretical objective necessity that was proper to the judgment of taste, I would know in advance that the thing was beautiful, so I would not need to experience it before making a judgment of taste. As we saw, in chapter two, the genuine judgment of taste is grounded in subjective feelings of pleasure, and such feelings can only be prompted by immediate and disinterested contemplation of the beautiful object.

Nor is Kant concerned here with “practical necessity”, which he describes as derivable from “concepts of a pure rational will.”<sup>1</sup> For in that case, the delight that one took in the beautiful object would be the necessary consequence of an objective law. This is not the case with the delight that is proper to the genuine judgment of taste. For that delight is taken in the free play of the faculties of

imagination and understanding, a free play prompted by the finality of form exhibited by the beautiful object.

Rather, the notion of necessity that Kant employs is taken by many commentators to be that of “exemplary necessity”, which Kant characterises as “a necessity of the assent of *all* to a judgment regarded as exemplifying a rule incapable of formulation.”<sup>2</sup>

Many commentators on the Critique of Judgment have held that the fourth moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful, where Kant assesses the role of necessity in helping to distinguish between judgments on the beautiful and judgments on the agreeable and the good, adds little to help forge the distinction. Thus, for example, Guyer writes that Kant’s “description of the requirement of necessity is almost indistinguishable from his exposition of the demand for universality.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Guyer considers that in the fourth moment Kant is reiterating what he says in the second moment. There Kant rules out certain kinds of pleasure as providing the proper grounds for the judgment of taste, namely those produced by interest or sensuous states. He writes: “A pleasure due to the harmony of imagination and understanding is a pleasure which one has just in virtue of possessing the faculties necessary for cognition, rather than because of some contingent fact about one’s own physiology or interests.”<sup>4</sup> The necessity that Guyer believes Kant to be employing in the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful, then, concerns the necessary agreement in response to a judgment of taste of all those who are constituted like the person who is making the judgment of taste. For, once I subtract my “empirical conditions”, that is my interests and the contingencies of my physiology, then the only kind of pleasure remaining that could ground an aesthetic judgment is the one that is due to the harmony of the faculties. Kant supposes that there is a parallel between

cognitive judgments and judgments of taste, one that Savile makes clear: “In the one case, the object that we truly judge to be spherical cannot but strike everyone as spherical; in the other, the object that we rightly judge to be beautiful cannot but elicit a response of universal pleasure.”<sup>5</sup> In both cases, there is a reference to the conditions of possibility: unless we suppose there is something common to all of us, then the judgment of taste is not possible. If we did not suppose a common understanding, we would not be able to make cognitive judgments; similarly, if we did not suppose a common sense we would not be able to make judgments of taste that could be true or false. Without the presupposition of a common sense, we would be able to make aesthetic judgments that accidentally agreed with each other, i.e. that actually acquired universal agreement. But such judgments would be grounded in private, contingent conditions (interests or physiologies).

Is Guyer right to claim that the requirement of necessity adds little to the requirement of universality? He is right in that in the second moment, Kant insists that the communicability characteristic of the genuine judgment of taste is universal because the pleasure taken in the beautiful is not prompted by the judge’s “empirical conditions” - interests or private sensuous states. Thus, Guyer is supported by Kant’s remark in the fourth moment: “[T]he universal communicability of a feeling presupposes a common sense.”<sup>6</sup> But Guyer is wrong if he supposes that the mere requirement of universality satisfactorily distinguishes between universal agreement of judgments on agreeable things and universal agreement of judgments on beautiful things. Savile writes that Kant clearly envisages “that there might be contingent agreement on a wide, even conceivably world wide, scale, . . . And then ‘contingently’ we should be confronted with something universally pleasing but nonetheless not beautiful.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, we need

to introduce necessity in order that judgments of agreeableness, which meet the criteria of disinterestedness, finality of form and universality, cannot properly be called judgments of beauty.

That, however, does not mean that we need the analysis of the fourth moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful, since the notion of necessity has been introduced in all but name in the second moment on universality. In the second moment, Kant does not seem concerned with the possibility of accidental universality of the kind that Savile is at pains to rule out as a condition of the genuine judgment of taste. Rather, Kant writes: “The judgment of taste does not itself *postulate* the agreement of every one . . . ; it only *imputes* this agreement to every one.”<sup>8</sup> This is no mere accidental convergence in judgment, but a judgment that is *necessarily* universal, or at least is thought to be so by the person who makes it. He may be wrong in thinking this, and if he is wrong that will show that he has not yet acquired taste. Thus, Kant writes: “The universal voice is, therefore, only an idea - resting upon grounds the investigation of which is here postponed. It may be a matter of uncertainty whether a person who thinks he is laying down a judgment of taste is, in fact, judging in conformity with that idea; but that this idea is what is contemplated in his judgment, and that, consequently, it is meant to be a judgment of taste, is proclaimed by his use of the expression ‘beauty’.”<sup>9</sup>

Earlier in the second moment, Kant contends that there would be no such thing as taste if it were not possible that a judge could make “a rightful claim upon the assent of all men.”<sup>10</sup> Once more, the notion of a “rightful claim” suggests that the assent of all men is a matter of necessity, and a normative matter at that, rather than contingency. Thus, the fourth moment offers a recapitulation at most of themes already explored in the second moment.

Guyer holds that the necessity with which we are concerned

concerns the grounds of the judgment of taste. Thus, when one reflects on the pleasure in a beautiful object, that pleasure is one due to a necessary rather than a contingent source, i.e. to the harmony of the faculties. That is, when one takes pleasure in a beautiful thing (a pleasure, furthermore, that is proper to the genuine judgment of taste), that feeling will be empirical, in that it is a subjective experience, but Guyer adds: “[I]f I take the further step of reflecting on the sources of my pleasure, then I may judge - though still empirically - that my pleasure is necessary rather than contingent, and this licences its a priori imputation to others.”<sup>11</sup>

Here Guyer is relying on the distinction that we considered in chapter two, between the content and ground of the judgment of taste. For Kant, the ground of the judgment of taste is a priori in that the judgment of taste can only be properly made on the basis of satisfying certain conditions, namely that it is made on the basis of disinterested delight, that is, the delight taken in the finality of form of the object and the harmony of the faculties. That licences the imputation of my judgment to others, while nothing in a judgment of agreeableness, even if it is, in fact, one that everybody agrees with, licences such imputation. For there is nothing in the latter that commands universal assent; the former does command universal assent, for Kant and for Guyer, because of the absence of empirical conditions in grounding the judgment. Here Guyer is not guilty of the charge that is sometimes levelled at Kant, that he conflates the terms a priori and necessity. Rather, he is correctly asserting that the grounds of the judgment of taste are a priori.

However, thus understood, the notion of necessity does not help sustain the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful. True, Kant may think that he has made this distinction secure already, for he contends that all sensual pleasures are interested and private. In the last chapter we argued against that

contention. There we maintained that there are contemplative sensual pleasures that ground judgments that are disinterested, potentially universal (albeit accidentally so), and taken in the harmony of the faculties and the finality of form of the objects of those pleasures. Such counter examples are not dealt with by Guyer's interpretation of Kantian necessity, since that effectively serves to reiterate conditions of possibility for judgments of taste given in the second moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful that we have already disputed.

#### ii) Actual and ideal judges

Savile claims that the necessity with which Kant is concerned is not to do with the ground of the judgment, but with its content. He claims that, in the case of the beautiful object, the only proper way to respond to it is with pleasure. Savile recognises the immediate objection to this point is that there are no necessities of this kind, since we can respond in many different ways to beautiful things. One reply to this is that, indeed, there are many ways in which one could respond to a beautiful object, but there is only one *proper* way, i.e. one that treats it as a beautiful object rather than one that satisfies an end, satisfies sensual cravings or one's desires or interests. Savile's reply is that the notion of necessity, as Kant seems to intend it, does not rely on actual responses, but on ideal ones. Hence, the judgment of taste retains its normative aspect. Savile writes: "When *ideal* judges come upon something truly beautiful, they find that there is no other way to respond to it than with pleasure."<sup>12</sup>

This interpretation of Kantian necessity clearly goes beyond Guyer's interpretation which envisages the necessity at issue to be necessity in the sense that we all must agree with the person

making the judgment of taste, if we were exposed to the beautiful object, because it is not grounded in the subject's empirical conditions. This interpretation also goes beyond the one that Savile offered in his earlier book Aesthetic Reconstructions, namely that which stipulates that the universal agreement of the judgment of taste is non-fortuitous. This interpretation, Savile writes in that book, "effects a distinction between the beautiful and the agreeable in a way congenial to Kant by insisting of the former that whatever generality of pleasure turns up in the analysis be non-fortuitous, whereas in the other case such a condition need not be met."<sup>13</sup> But this distinction would not have the result that contemplative sensual pleasures, such as those of gastronomy or wine-tasting, fell under the heading of the agreeable: they would be non-fortuitously pleasurable because they would not be grounded in interest, or in the alleged contingencies of particular physiologies.

One of the hopes for the notion of necessity developed in Savile's later book, Kantian Aesthetics Pursued, is that, once it serves to account for the mind-expanding qualities that experiences of the beautiful purportedly offer, we can argue that contemplative sensual pleasures have no mind-expanding role and therefore are not proper to the genuine judgment of taste.

First, of course, we need to see how that notion of necessity is developed, and, second, we need to see how it connects with the view that experiences of beautiful things are mind-expanding.

First, then, Savile focuses on Kant's remarks on necessity in section 22 of the Analytic of the Sublime. There Kant writes: "The assertion is not that everyone *will* fall in with our judgment, but rather that everyone *ought* to agree with it. Here I put forward my judgment of taste as an example of the judgment of common sense, and attribute to it on that account *exemplary* validity. Hence common sense is a mere ideal norm."<sup>14</sup> By contrast, commentators

such as Guyer take the Kantian notion of common sense to consist in the actual shared faculties that make the judgment of taste possible. Savile regards it as a sense which is shared by those who have cultivated their taste - ideal judges rather than actual ones. It is the former judges who cannot but respond to the beautiful object with pleasure. Actual judges *should* respond with pleasure to the beautiful object, but there is no guarantee that they will, because they may not have the refinement necessary to make the true judgment of taste. This does not mean that their responses to the beautiful object will not ground genuine judgments of taste: they will do, if they satisfy the criteria of being *grounded* properly, but the *content* of those judgments need not be true. They *may* be true, but it is only those who have taste who are likely to make true judgments of taste for the right reasons.

Savile, here, is arguing that taste is an artificial faculty. In so doing he is answering the question that Kant explicitly sets aside. Kant writes in section 22: "But does such a common sense in fact exist as a constitutive principle of the possibility of experience, or is it formed for us as a regulative principle by a still higher principle of reason, that for higher ends first seeks to beget in us a common sense? Is taste in other words a natural and original faculty, or is it only the idea of one that is artificial and to be acquired by us? . . . These questions we have neither the wish nor the power to investigate as yet . . ." <sup>15</sup>

What arguments does Savile have for his view that taste is an artificial faculty? He contends that when Kant writes that we ought to share the judgment of the one who has made a true judgment of taste, what we are being invited to do is to cultivate our taste so that we react in the same way to a beautiful object as would an ideal judge. Savile writes: "What Kant is getting at is that if we could find a 'higher purpose' for acquiring taste, then we ought to acquire



it, and our doing so would make it possible for us what otherwise we would not be able to do, namely regularly and predictably share our aesthetic pleasures with one another.”<sup>16</sup> He also argues that, for Kant, the aesthetic “ought” pertains to the acquisition of the faculty of taste rather than to taking delight in the individual beautiful object.

### iii) The aesthetic “ought”

As we said in the last section, actual judges *ought* to acquire taste, that is, they should aspire to have the developed tastes of the ideal judges. However, one does not need taste to make a genuine judgment of taste; one does, however, need taste to make true judgments of taste. The case Kant considers of the young poet in section 32 makes this point plainly. “Hence it is that a youthful poet refuses to allow himself to be dissuaded from the conviction that his poem is beautiful, either by the judgment of the public or his friends.”<sup>17</sup> This poet, we are to suppose, makes his judgment according to the criteria of the genuine judgment of taste: it is not an interested judgment, it is universally communicable in the sense that it is not grounded on interest or the particularities of the poet’s own physiology, the delight he experiences is properly prompted by the harmony of the faculties and the finality of form that the poem exhibits. Nonetheless it is wrong: later he changes his judgment on his poem, his taste sharpened by exercise. His earlier judgment of taste, though genuine, was not necessary, since it was not one that the ideal judges would have made of the poem.

Thus, when we are told that we ought to acquire taste, it is not just that we ought to experience beautiful objects and make judgments of taste about them. That would be the force of the aesthetic “ought” if it were true that the faculty of taste is a natural faculty and the supposition of a common sense exists as a

constitutive principle of the possibility of experience. Rather, we are told that we ought to acquire taste in order to desirably enrich the mind. In the next chapter, we shall consider what such enrichment might consist in and the extent to which such a reason for acquiring taste can be defended.

The case of the young poet effectively rules out one way of acquiring taste. That way would be to submit to the judgment of his coevals on the poem, and make his judgment of taste conform with theirs. But this is not something that he can do: if he *makes* his judgment of taste conform with his friends' then it will not be a genuine judgment of taste, since it will be grounded in the interest of making that judgment conform. As Kant says: "Taste lays claim simply to autonomy. To make the judgments of others the determining ground of one's own would be heteronomy."<sup>18</sup>

Does Kant offer advice on *how* to acquire taste, rather than merely urging that we *ought* to acquire taste? He considers that some great writers can serve as models, and that these writers constitute "a sort of nobility . . . that . . . gives laws to the people."<sup>19</sup> But he maintains such laws are not such that they contradict the autonomy of taste; rather, they give examples of the sort of writers it is proper to admire without saying that such writers *must* be admired. One can only make a genuine judgment of taste in favour of such great writers if one has arrived at that judgment freely.

#### iv) Conclusion

The condition of necessity is fundamental for distinguishing between the beautiful and the agreeable, However, if that condition is taken in the way in which Guyer interprets Kant, then it will not help in forging that distinction. For, although Guyer hopes that the Kantian stipulation whereby judgments grounded in contingent factors about the judge, such as interests and peculiarities of

physiologies, are not genuine judgments of taste, would rule out all judgments of agreeableness, this is not the case. Guyer interprets Kant as arguing that only those judgments made on the basis of pleasures taken in the harmony of the faculties are necessary. But, in this chapter and the last, we have argued for the existence of contemplative pleasures of the palate, and these pleasures provide a counter example to Guyer's thesis.

However, if we take Savile's interpretation of necessity as being concerned with the content of the judgment of taste rather than its ground, then there remains some hope that such pleasures can be excluded from the domain of the beautiful, and so we could argue that judgments on contemplative pleasures of the palate do not ground genuine judgments of taste. That notion of necessity concerns the responses of ideal judges to beautiful objects: these judges, who have acquired the faculty of taste, cannot but respond to beautiful objects with pleasure. But, although their judgments of taste are thoroughly and properly disinterested, their reasons for acquiring taste are not. They acquire taste in order to enrich the mind. But the contemplative pleasures of the palate cannot (without absurdity) be said to enrich the mind, at least in the same way as beautiful objects, so that such judgments cannot be properly said to be judgments of taste. Whether these contemplative pleasures of the palate can survive as counter examples to Kant's attempt to distinguish between the beautiful and the agreeable, then, depends on whether credence can be given to the view that beautiful objects enrich the mind and that it is for this reason that we acquire taste. We shall explore that view in the next chapter.

Notes on Chapter 5

1. Kant, op. cit., p.81.
2. Ibid., p.81.
3. Guyer, op. cit., p. 161.
4. Ibid., p.163.
5. Savile, op. cit., Kantian Aesthetics Pursued, p.23.
6. Kant, op. cit., p.84.
7. Savile, op. cit., Aesthetic Reconstructions, p.124.
8. Kant, op. cit., p.56.
9. Ibid., pp.56-7.
10. Ibid., p.52.
11. Guyer, op. cit., p.166.
12. Savile, op. cit., Kantian Aesthetics Pursued, p.24.
13. Savile, op. cit., Aesthetic Reconstructions, p.125.
14. Kant, op. cit., p.84.
15. Ibid., p.85.
16. Savile, op. cit., Aesthetic Reconstructions, p.156.
17. Kant, op. cit., p.137.
18. Ibid., p.137.
19. Ibid., p.137-8.

## Chapter 6: Art and Aesthetic Ideas

### i) Kant's distinction between art and natural beauty

The analysis of the judgment of taste that we have considered in chapters 2 to 6 is taken by Kant to apply just as much to judgments of artistic beauty as to judgments of natural beauty. However, some critics have taken the Analytic of the Beautiful, where Kant sets out the characteristics of the judgment of taste, to fit badly with his remarks about the nature of art and genius that he gives in the Analytic of the Sublime. Thus, Mothersill contends: “[I]t looks as if Kant, when it came to considering what we expect of the fine arts, forgot about his previous commitments and made up a new theory, a theory which, though it made a deep impression on Coleridge and other romantic thinkers, is, if not strictly inconsistent with the Analytic of the Beautiful, very different in spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Miall writes: “It is a serious criticism of Kant that, in terms of his formal system (as opposed to his remarks on genius), it is impossible to see how Shakespeare can be accommodated at all.”<sup>2</sup> Miall’s chief argument is that the Analytic of the Beautiful characterises the judgment of taste in such a way that appreciation of art is not satisfactorily accounted for. He contends that the first analytic is one which focuses on beautiful objects that have no intrinsic meaning (flowers, birds, crustacea, designs a la grecque etc.), with the implication that the most valuable work of art must have intrinsic meaning. Miall is critical of this aspect of the first analytic since he wants to argue that art does have a purpose other than that of encouraging a pleasurable response in the spectator. This point concerns Miall’s view that: “The purpose of art lies in the transformation of the thought that constitutes the self.”<sup>3</sup> We shall not assess Miall’s alternative aesthetic (although in the next chapter we shall consider whether art must have a purpose), but we should

note that this alleged transformative purpose presupposes, for Miall, that the beautiful object is not a free beauty, but one which necessitates “seeing concepts as intrinsic to works of art.”<sup>4</sup> It is true that Kant does not consider many examples taken from art in his account of the judgment of taste, and that this may stem from a predisposition in favour of nature (however, to impute to him a philistinism on account of this, or to suggest that such a predisposition inevitably means that his philosophical account of judgments on artistic beauty is thereby wrong, as some critics have done, would be presumptuous). But Kant’s distinction between free and dependent beauty is one that, sympathetically considered, provides a bridge between the first and second analytics, for the class of judgments of dependent beauty include many, perhaps most, of the judgments of artistic beauty. Unfortunately, Miall does not consider this distinction and thus his argument is inadequate.

If, however, Miall had argued that Kant seeks to supplement the subjective conditions of the judgment of taste that he gives in the Analytic of the Beautiful with additional factors to make his analysis of judgments of taste about works of art more plausible, then his argument could not be dismissed so easily. For the distinction between free and dependent beauty alone is not enough to characterise judgments of taste about works of art. Thus, that distinction cuts across the distinction between natural beauty and art rather than serving to sustain it. There are clearly many judgments of taste on natural beauties that are dependent (judgments on beautiful faces, animals, etc.), and some judgments of taste on works of art that are free (one may take disinterested delight in a piece of music only in the subjective finality of its form, rather than by deeming it to be perfect in some relevant sense *and* being disinterestedly delighted by the music). However, it is true that free beauties abound in nature, but not in art, and that

judgments of taste on works of art are for the most part judgments of taste on dependent beauties (exceptions include non-vocal music which, for Kant, was a free beauty). It is proper that, when we judge a work of art, we consider the end for which it was created and to that extent such judgment will take the work as a dependent beauty.

Kant makes several distinctions that enable us to see the difference between judgments of taste on natural beauties and judgments of taste on works of art. He writes: “*Art* is distinguished from *nature* as making (*facere*) is from acting or operating in general (*agere*).”<sup>5</sup> He also distinguishes art from science, the former being a human skill which is a practical faculty rather than a theoretical one; free art is distinguished from craft, the former having “soul” rather than being merely mechanical. It is such free art with which we are concerned in making aesthetic judgments on works of art; again, however, there is a distinction, namely between the free art that is agreeable and that which is beautiful. The latter is fine art, the proper object of judgments of taste on works of art.

Kant insists on the following relationship between art and nature: “Nature proved beautiful when it wore the appearance of art; and art can only be termed beautiful, where we are conscious of its being art, while yet it has the appearance of nature.”<sup>6</sup> There are several points implicit in this elliptical remark. One is that nature should be treated as an artifact if it is to be considered as beautiful, i.e. it must *appear* to have been designed (that is what enables the natural beauty to exhibit finality of form). Another point is that art must be considered as an intentional product if it is to be judged as beautiful (for the same reasons that we have just seen apply to the case of natural beauty), but the actual intentions of the artist cannot be grounds for judging a thing to be beautiful. This is what Kant suggests when he writes: “Hence the finality in

the product of fine art, intentional though it be, must not have the appearance of being intentional.”<sup>7</sup> Schaper rightly contends: “Normally when something is made with the intention to produce a thing of a certain kind, the agent follows an antecedent concept of the thing he wishes to bring into existence. But there is, Kant has been at pains to establish, no concept of beauty and thus no rule according to which to produce a thing of beauty.”<sup>8</sup> The problem then arises of how we are to account for the artist’s intentions in judging a work of art. It would seem, from what Kant says in section 15, that we ignore the intentionality of a work of art for the purposes of taste. But in section 48, Kant writes: “If, however, the object is presented as a product of art and is as such declared to be beautiful, then, seeing that art always presupposes an end in the cause (and its causality), a concept of what the thing is intended to be must first of all be laid at its basis.”<sup>9</sup> It is clear that the concept could not be “beautiful thing”, since there can be no rules for creating beautiful things, nor would an end as vague as “work of art” be satisfying, but, for example, “opera” or “representation of my friend” may be sufficient to serve as intended ends. Thus, we need not ignore the intentions of the artist in judging a work of art, but if the intention was to make a beautiful object, that intention cannot be relevant to the judgment of taste. Rather, the work will delight if it is beautiful irrespective of whether the work was intended to be beautiful. The point that Kant is very much concerned with at this point is that there can be no rules for creating a beautiful thing, so that, even if the artist intends to create a beautiful work, that intention can not be relevant to the judge who makes the judgment of taste.

#### ii) Judgments of dependent beauty on works of art

We concluded in chapter 2 that the notion of dependent beauty was



not coherent. But, assuming for the moment that it could be made coherent, how would the notion of dependent beauty apply to judgments of taste on works of art?

The most promising and developed account of dependent beauty that we considered in chapter 2 was Anthony Savile's; Kant himself, lamentably, does not develop the distinction between free and dependent beauty very far. Savile's proposal was that in the case of objects that are dependently beautiful, "they have to be perfect to be beautiful".<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the requirement of perfection should be taken loosely in accordance with the example of physiological typicality.

One can appreciate that this is a desirable move, if Savile is to be able to reply to charges that the introduction of perfection into the notion of the judgment of dependent beauty is implausible. Those who are not attracted to this proposal will reply that it is strikingly implausible just in the case of works of art where it is supposed to be plausible and helpful. Objectors will charge that there are no perfect operas, song cycles, idylls; or if there were, it would not be necessary for operas, song cycles or idylls to be perfect if they were to be considered beautiful. Savile concedes that there seems to be no reply to the question "What is a perfect opera or song cycle or idyll?", but his use of Kant's example of physiological typicality is intended to take the sting from the question. But it does not seem to. Thus, in the case of an opera it is hard to know how to take the claim that an opera must be perfect in the sense that it loosely approaches some mean in the same way as a physiologically typical man may be said to approach some mean. It is difficult to see that Orfeo ed Eurydice and Nixon in China, both of which we may want to call beautiful, approximate to some common mean on account of which we can call them perfect, and on account of their perfection in that respect entitles us to

pronounce on their beauty in the form of genuine judgments of taste. The point is not that these two operas spring from very different times and traditions, but that they have nothing very much in common except that they are operas.

Moreover, as the second charge claims, even if there were perfect operas, it could not be a requirement of an opera that it be perfect if it is to be judged beautiful. Berg's opera Lulu is unfinished, but it is nonetheless beautiful and an opera; however, it surely cannot be taken, even in the loose sense that Savile suggests, as a perfect opera. It does not meet, or approximate, a standard of correctness for operas, for even if such a standard existed or was proper to the dependent judgment of artistic beauty, that standard would have to specify that the opera was not unfinished.

Savile would seem to be on stronger ground when he applies the notion of perfection or a loosely-conceived standard of perfection that we introduced in chapter 2 to the central cases of dependently beautiful works of art that involve representations. Here it is perhaps clearer that a standard of correctness, again a loose one, should apply if such a work of art is to be taken as dependently beautiful. The insistence on a loose standard is desirable because we shall want to consider such representations as de Kooning's Woman No 1 as beautiful. But how loosely can the standard of correctness be taken? Woman No 1, like many important figurative paintings in 20th century art, distorts the human figure for aesthetic effect: it would not be obviously absurd to suggest that if such paintings are judged beautiful, one of the delightful aspects of them that prompts such a judgment is that they depart so radically and deliberately from a physiologically typical figure.

However, there are works of art for which a standard of correctness in their representations is necessary if it is to be

considered beautiful, and if Savile is taken as considering only these, then his argument is strong. But this only seems to be the case with realistic representations. He writes: "So far as a beautiful work of representative art goes, we should find it incapable of satisfying us in the right way, incapable of expressing an enriching aesthetic idea or enlarging our thought about the topic that it treats, unless this minimal requirement were met, a requirement imposed by our interest in having a representation of the thing in question at all."<sup>11</sup> If what he says is true, then in the case of such deliberate figurative distortion as Woman No. 1, what interests us and what is enriching is not the painting's success as a representation but something else. Perhaps that something else is its expressive force - a force that arises from its distortion of the human figure. But if what Savile says here is not true, then in the case of Woman No. 1, we are interested and enriched, at least in part, by the representation and how that representation involves distorting the human figure.

The problem for Savile's account of dependent judgments of artistic beauty becomes more apparent when we consider the case of a beautiful novel. Even if this is a realistic novel that represents, for example, life in 19th century London, how do we apply the notion of a standard of correctness to it? Clearly, it would be absurd to insist that the characters had to be typical, or approach some mean for the novel to count as a successful representation of 19th century London; still less would it be plausible to suggest that a representative novel of this kind must deal with certain subjects in certain ways if it is to count as representative.

### iii) Aesthetic ideas

When Kant distinguishes mechanical from free art, he does so by stipulating that the genius will articulate aesthetic ideas in her

work, she will inject Geist or soul into inert matter, or, as Kant puts it, her imagination will create “a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature”<sup>12</sup>. Soul, for Kant here, signifies the “animating principle” in the mind, and this principle is “nothing else than the faculty for presenting *aesthetic ideas*”.

An aesthetic idea, which Savile in particular has taken as fundamental for Kant’s account of art, is defined as “that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. *concept*, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible.”<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Kant describes *rational* ideas as the counterpart of aesthetic ideas: the former are concepts of reason that cannot be represented in intuition (i.e. these are ideas such that no experience can grasp everything that is significant about them); while aesthetic ideas are intuitions for which no concept is adequate.

In a very tightly written passage, Kant distinguishes between rational and aesthetic ideas by means of explaining the poet’s task. “The poet essays the task of interpreting to sense the rational ideas of invisible being, the kingdom of the blessed, hell, eternity, creation &c. Or, again, as to things of which examples occur in experience, e.g. death, envy and all the vices, as also love, fame and the like, transgressing the limits of experience he attempts with the aid of an imagination which emulates the display of reason in its attainment of a maximum, to body them forth to sense with a completeness of which nature affords no parallel.”<sup>14</sup>

Savile takes this quotation to indicate that Kant thinks that works of art can treat of a subject matter or theme, and that such themes are of two types: things that we come across in experience or things that do not. This is clearly true and a proper

interpretation of Kant: works of art do deal with such important themes and Kant is right to think that they do. However, Savile goes on to say: “These themes I take it are what Kant calls *rational ideas*, and no intuition is adequate to them in that we can never say of any experience, concrete or imagined, in which such things figure that it captures everything significant about them.”<sup>15</sup> This is a mistaken interpretation of what Kant says in the quoted passage. There, Kant does not equate rational ideas with the important themes with which works of art deal; rather, he states that the poet strives to present rational ideas *and* he also essays the task of interpreting to sense examples of things that occur in experience. The latter sub-class of themes are not rational ideas. Indeed, the definition of a rational idea in section 49 of the Analytic of the Sublime that we are considering, is that it “is a concept, to which no *intuition* (representation of the imagination) can be adequate.”<sup>16</sup> Events that occur in experience, such as death or experiences such as envy, love etc., can be instantiated in experience and so cannot be rational ideas. Kant, in the Critique of Pure Reason and the Critique of Judgment, describes a rational idea as something that cannot be realised in experience. Thus, for example, in the first remark in section 57, Kant writes of the rational ideas that they are “incapable of ever furnishing a concept of the object”. He later adds: “A rational idea can never become a cognition, because it involves a *concept* (of the supersensible), for which a commensurate intuition can never be given.”<sup>17</sup> Death, love and envy cannot be rational ideas if this definition is correct, since they do not involve concepts of the supersensible; moreover, commensurate intuitions *can* be given for such events and experiences.

Savile’s position can be remedied. Thus, rather than claiming that aesthetic ideas are presentations of favoured subject matters or themes and that those themes are rational ideas, he could claim

that aesthetic ideas are presentations of favoured subject matters and that only some of those subject matters are rational ideas.

However, this would require that a coherent sense could be given for the notion of an aesthetic idea. But Kant's definition of an aesthetic idea is far from clear. Kant's definition of an aesthetic idea implies that it is akin to a good metaphor, i.e. it is suggestive but its power is ineffable. But, if it is merely akin to a good metaphor, rather than a good metaphor, it fits ill with the examples that Kant gives of aesthetic ideas. Alternatively, Kant may be stating that the aesthetic idea just is a good metaphor - certainly that seems to be what the suggestion amounts to when he writes: "Jupiter's eagle, with the lightning in its claws, is an attribute of the mighty king of heaven, and the peacock of its stately queen."<sup>18</sup> But that alternative is not plausible, since not all good metaphors are spiritually enriching. Moreover, a metaphor has to be something expressed in words, and so cannot apply across all arts. Kant, however, considers that aesthetic ideas can be expressed in all art forms, so an aesthetic idea cannot be equivalent to a metaphor.

The main problem for the notion of an aesthetic idea, however, is that it is not clear what it means for an idea to be such that it cannot be brought under a concept. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the aesthetic idea is associated with a concept (either the rational ideas of creation, etc., or the other, sensible, ideas of death etc.). In fact, both Kant and Savile treat the notion of an aesthetic idea as though it is a presentation, rather than merely a counterpart, of a rational idea. But, when one judges a thing to be beautiful, it is not immediately apparent that one cannot bring it under a concept. Thus, when I judge a rose to be beautiful, I can bring that intuition under a concept, namely that of a rose. Furthermore, when I judge a rose to be beautiful that does not involve "much thought" - the mental activity that Kant charges is

characteristic of a beautiful thing's expression of aesthetic ideas.

It could be replied that in this section Kant is explicitly concerned with works of genius and that a beautiful rose is not a work of genius, but this is not a strong objection. Even if Kant is at this point concerned with the products of genius, the expression of aesthetic ideas is not confined by Kant to those works. Thus at the start of section 51, Kant writes: "Beauty (whether it be of nature or of art) may in general be termed the *expression* of aesthetic ideas."<sup>19</sup> It may, indeed, be difficult to grasp what aesthetic idea or subject matter a beautiful rose expresses, or to support the view that finding a rose to be beautiful involves much thought, but these are not our concerns at this point: instead, we are concerned with demonstrating that a beautiful object such as a rose can be brought under a concept, and that in such a central case, Kant believes that the object's beauty can be termed its expression of an aesthetic idea. If it is true that a beautiful object can be brought under a concept, then this undermines Kant's definition of an aesthetic idea.

In his book, Aesthetic Reconstructions, Savile develops the view that the ideas that are presented in the spiritually enriching work of art are of a favoured class, namely just those that are spiritually enriching. So the aesthetic idea is that which provides the spiritual enrichment that we need from a work of art and cannot but take in as pleasurable. What Savile is concerned to argue, in reconstructing the notion of aesthetic ideas, is that there is a favoured class of rational ideas and that these constitute the subject matter for the best works of art. The way in which a subject matter is presented in a work of art is the aesthetic idea. Contemplating a work of art involves being mentally stimulated in a pleasurable way by the way in which certain subject matters are presented in a work of art. That mental stimulation can be

accounted for in Kantian terms by stating that it involves the imagination and the understanding engaging in free and harmonious play. Savile draws an analogy between the beneficial effect of eating food and the beneficial effect on the spirit of the contemplating of beautiful objects, which Kant explicitly identifies with objects (natural and artefactual) that express aesthetic ideas in section 51. From exposure to aesthetic ideas, Savile supposes, we develop a dispositional psychic strength - dispositional in that "through acquaintance with the beautiful object, we learn to think and feel in new ways about a multitude of things, not just about the particular one that embodies the quickening aesthetic idea."<sup>20</sup>

That some works of art help us to develop such psychic strength is not in question; what is debatable is the thought that all beautiful things, by definition, express the aesthetic ideas that those who have taste cannot but experience with delight and psychic nourishment. However, this is what Kant in effect claims when he makes the stipulation that beauty, either natural beauties or works of art, consists in the expression of aesthetic ideas. This is a very strong claim, one that goes further than claiming that the expression of aesthetic ideas is necessary for a thing to be judged beautiful. Thus, this claim is stronger than Savile's stipulation that the dependent beauty must be perfect if it is to be considered beautiful; rather, the expression of aesthetic ideas is taken here as sufficient, in general, for beauty.

Surely it would have been better to introduce the notion of the psychically enriching powers of works of art as a criterion of aesthetic value, rather than as identifying the expression of aesthetic ideas with beauty. That seems to be a far too reductive proposal to satisfactorily account for the delight that we take in the beautiful.

Furthermore, the notion of an aesthetic idea is so problematic



that it would have been better for Savile to replace it in his reconstruction of Kant's aesthetics with the relatively clear notion of the way in which a work of art treats an important subject matter. That treatment may be successful or not, and that would determine whether a work could be taken as beautiful, though if there was no intention on the part of the artist to treat that important subject matter, then it would be a mistake to judge the work on account of its success or failure in presenting that subject. Equally importantly, we should be able to account for the disjunction between the beauty of a work of art and its expression of spiritually enriching ideas. There are four possibilities for such beautiful works of art: that they express ideas that are trivial, but despite that, they are enriching since the treatment of these trivial ideas pleases disinterestedly; that they express no ideas, but they are nonetheless enriching; that they express no ideas, and they are not spiritually enriching; that they express ideas, but these ideas are not presented in a spiritually enriching way and nothing else about the works is spiritually enriching, so that the works are beautiful but in no way enriching.

#### iv) Conclusion

In this chapter, we have assessed the notion that judgments about art can be taken as judgments of dependent beauty, and found it not to be coherent when applied to those works which we judge apart from their representative efficacy. In such cases, the standard of correctness, or perfection, even if loosely understood, seems to be one that cannot be applied unproblematically to central cases of works of art. We have also assessed the Kantian notion of an aesthetic idea and found it to be problematic. However, that should not lead to the conclusion that works of art are not considered valuable on account of the way in which they treat important

subject matters; rather, we have argued that the notion of the aesthetic idea is not a happy one and should not be used in an account of artistic beauty. Furthermore, the view that works of art, or indeed any beautiful objects, can only be characterised as such on account of the fact that they express aesthetic ideas was found to be unconvincing: that which delights disinterestedly and not on account of some appetite or private sensual predilection is an object of a judgment of taste that a thing is beautiful.

By contrast, we may be disinterestedly delighted by the way in which the work of art, for instance, expresses a certain theme, but the value for us of that expression, if it concerns a spiritual need or hunger, will derive from an interest which is combined with the disinterested pleasure. We shall consider the possibility of such combination in the next chapter. It is worth pointing out that nothing has been said so far to preclude contemplative sensual pleasures from being considered proper grounds of judgments of taste.

### Notes on Chapter 6

1. Mary Mothersill, Beauty Restored, (Oxford University Press, 1984), p.227.
2. David S. Miall, 'Kant's Critique of Judgement: A Biased Aesthetic', British Journal of Aesthetics, 1980, p.138.
3. Ibid., p.139.
4. Ibid., p.139.
5. Kant, op. cit., pp.162-3.
6. Ibid., p.167.
7. Ibid., p.167.
8. Eva Schaper, 'Taste, sublimity, and genius', in The Cambridge Companion to Kant (Cambridge University Press, 1992), edited by Paul Guyer, p.389.
9. Kant, op. cit., p.173.
10. Savile, op. cit., Kantian Aesthetics Pursued, p.114.
11. Ibid., p.117.
12. Kant, op. cit., p.176.
13. Ibid., pp.175-6.
14. Ibid., pp.176-7.
15. Savile, op. cit., Aesthetic Reconstructions, p.170.
16. Kant, op. cit., p.176.
17. Ibid., p.210.
18. Ibid., p.177.
19. Ibid., p.183.
20. Savile, op. cit., Kantian Aesthetics Pursued, p.96.

## Chapter 7: Interest in the Beautiful

### i) The empirical interest in the beautiful

Throughout the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant is concerned to maintain that the pleasure that grounds the judgment of taste is disinterested. However, in the Analytic of the Sublime, he argues that it does not follow from this that an interest cannot be combined with it. How can this happen without the judgment of taste being infected with an unwarranted interest? Kant explains that this combination must be indirect. He writes: “Taste must, that is to say, first of all be represented in conjunction with something else, if the delight attending the mere reflection upon an object is to admit of having further conjoined with it *a pleasure in the real existence* of the object (as wherein all interest consists).”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the delight that one takes in the real existence of an object is interested, but the delight that one takes in the form of the object is not, as the conditions of the genuine judgment of taste given by Kant in the Analytic of the Beautiful stipulate.

There are two kinds of interest that Kant considers can enter into combination with the disinterested delight that grounds the judgment of taste. The first is the empirical interest in the beautiful that Kant contends only exists in society, and that interest is explained by reference to the drive towards sociability. When one cultivates taste, that is, one does so at least partly because the doing so provides a means toward greater sociability. Kant writes: “With no one to take into account but himself a man abandoned on a desert island would not adorn himself or his hut, nor would he look for flowers, still less plant them, with the object of providing himself with personal adornments.”<sup>2</sup> This, as we argued in chapter 4, is at best a speculative and at worst a dubious thesis. Furthermore, this empirical interest does not offer a compelling

reason to cultivate taste: it is not the case that having taste is necessary to provide a means to greater sociability, indeed there may be many better ways of achieving that aim. Nor does it seem plausible that, as a matter of fact, people cultivate taste chiefly in order to achieve that aim. It remains possible, though, that there are other empirical interests in the beautiful that Kant does not consider.

#### ii) The intellectual interest in the beautiful

Kant strives for another interest in the beautiful that would provide a more compelling reason or obligation on everybody to cultivate taste. Unlike the interest in the beautiful that is directed at promoting sociability, the intellectual interest is supposed to provide a non-contingent, a priori reason for cultivating taste.

It is unfortunate that in section 42, where he discusses the intellectual interest in the beautiful, Kant insists that one can only take such interest in natural beauties, and that only an immediate interest in the beauty of nature is the mark of the good soul. As a result, he offers a unsatisfactory and reductive account of the appeal of art. Thus, he writes that if a man with taste enough to judge works of fine art chooses to leave the room in which he “meets with those beauties that minister to vanity or, at least, social joys,” and instead chooses to appreciate the beauty of nature, he will be given credit for “a beautiful soul, to which no connoisseur or art collector can lay claim on the score of the interest which his objects have for him.”<sup>3</sup> Kant writes as though the only interest we can have in the beautiful work of art is that which is not only empirical, but concerned with sociability or vanity. That is a reductive interpretation in that it assumes that our interest in works of art is concerned with sociability, collecting or being a connoisseur, and one which is unsatisfactory if we are to account

for what Savile calls the spiritually enriching role of works of art. That is, neither the empirical interest in the beautiful, if it is merely couched in terms of sociability, nor the intellectual interest in the beautiful help to explain the interest we have in works of art.

It seems to be Kant's thought in this section that our interest in works of art is less likely to be indicative of a good moral character than our interest in natural beauties since it is bound up with social vanities. By contrast, our interest in the beauties of nature is more readily explained by a delight that something exists, and that that thing is not dependent on our social concerns. Savile interprets this to mean that we prize objects that are distinct from ourselves and self subsistent. He writes: "Here is a necessary basis in feeling for an eventual concern for others."<sup>4</sup>

There are two problems with Kant's thought. First, it is not necessary that our interest in works of art is to do with sociability; it is possible that such works could serve the role of those distinct objects that lend themselves towards an intellectual interest in the beautiful and thus are a mark of the beautiful soul. Second, Savile points out that Kant's argument only asserts that we should develop disinterested attachments to some natural object or other, not that we should develop attachments to the same one. But, if Kant's thesis about the acquisition of taste is to be made plausible, so that those who have acquired that taste find the *same* objects disinterestedly pleasing, then his argument here is inadequate. It is a requirement of the genuine judgment of taste that the one who makes it can demand agreement from others, or at least from everybody else who has acquired taste.

### iii) The third way

Aesthetic ideas are important to Kant in the analysis of aesthetic experience in that they provide another way of distinguishing the

experience of the beautiful from that of the agreeable, or the morally good. As expressed in works of art or in nature, aesthetic ideas are supposed to serve to satisfy our spiritual needs. In the previous chapter, we argued that the notion of an aesthetic idea was too problematic to be useful, but could be replaced by the notion of an important theme or subject matter, where “important” concerned the propensity of the expression of that subject matter or theme to provide mental stimulation in much the same way as was hypothesised of the aesthetic idea. The problem then arises of how to account for our engagement with such themes in aesthetic experiences without specifying an interest in them which infringes the disinterestedness criterion which Kant saw as one of the marks of the experience of the beautiful. Savile attempts to achieve such an account.

We could not say, for instance, that we engage with works of art *because* they satisfy our spiritual needs, on Kant’s account, for then our pleasure would be interested, that is, it would arise from the satisfaction of a prior desire. Savile makes this point when he rules out the first possible way of linking our engagement with the aesthetic ideas of a work of art with the disinterested pleasure we take in the beautiful. But there is another possibility that Savile does not consider: that we engage with works of art *because* they satisfy our spiritual needs, but the pleasure we may or may not experience on appreciating those works of art arises disinterestedly, that is, without reference to the desire. For example, one goes to an opera after reading the following: “When Wagner expresses through the music of Tristan the unassuageable longing of erotic love, it is . . . as though we had to rise above our own circumscribed passions and glimpsed a completion to which they aspire.”<sup>5</sup> One hopes, perhaps even expects, to engage with this theme, but instead one takes pleasure in the music for its own sake,

irrespective of the hope of the author that one might have a very different kind of aesthetic experience, one which “involves a perpetual striving to pass beyond the limits of our point of view”, and one which “seems to ‘embody’ what cannot be thought.”<sup>6</sup> That is, one’s actual experience confounds one’s desire. Of course, such an experience would be an oddity: if one regularly derived something from artistic experience other than that which prompted one to experience it in the first place, one would modify one’s desires or practices so that the one conformed with the other. A lifetime of aesthetic experiences could not be made up of one’s expectations being (albeit satisfyingly) confounded, for one would adjust one’s expectations accordingly.

But there is something odd, nonetheless, in Savile’s peremptory disqualification of the first way of forging the connection between pleasure and engagement with aesthetic ideas. Thus, in the example just considered, what would happen if one’s pleasure was the fulfilment of a prior desire, namely to engage with an aesthetic idea in just the way mentioned by the author, and in so doing satisfy one’s spiritual needs? Why is this not a genuinely aesthetic pleasure? Because it seems that this is often what we do when we answer the invitation to aesthetic experience: we read a review, or some other recommendation, and think that we will experience something that will satisfy our spiritual needs. The reason seems to be that stated by McGhee: “The interested pleasures connected with the agreeable and the good are pleasures that depend upon some recognition (whether conscious or unconscious) of a connection between the object and our desires or ends, and no doubt there are going to be pleasures of this kind associated with works of art or beautiful aspects of nature. But Kant is simply denying that aesthetic pleasure is of this kind. His warrant for doing so seems to be the experience of the relevant



absorption. What he calls the ‘quickenings of cognitive faculties’ is itself a pleasure or enjoyment.”<sup>7</sup> The pleasure one experiences on hearing a performance of Tristan, then, is an experience of beauty only to the extent that it arises from contemplation of the work. That such contemplation does indeed satisfy a prior desire, namely a desire to satisfy one’s spiritual needs by exposing oneself to a work of art that presents aesthetic ideas, does not mean that the work of art is *aesthetically* pleasing: one’s spiritual needs could, conceivably, be just as readily satisfied by contemplation of another work of art or a work of philosophy, when it is assumed by hypothesis that the aesthetic qualities of the latter are negligible or at least not noticed by the spectator. Levinson insists that a proper account of aesthetic pleasure must show such pleasure as “individualising, appreciating an object for what it most distinctively, if not uniquely, is”<sup>8</sup>. That is to say, we are to suppose that each work of art is to be experienced and, hence, valued in a way distinct from any other work: otherwise it is likely that we are valuing the work for non-aesthetic reasons. Just as, if a novel by D.H. Lawrence would just as easily satisfy one’s spiritual need to understand sexual longing as Tristan, that would mean one’s desire was not to have an aesthetic experience, but one that satisfied one’s spiritual desires. If one experienced the same pleasure on experiencing that D.H. Lawrence novel as Tristan, that might lead one to be suspicious that one’s pleasures weren’t genuinely aesthetic. It would not be the case that they were pleasures which arose from contemplation of the works of art for themselves, but pleasures which would be likely to rest upon the fulfilment of the same prior desire, and thus they would be disqualified as aesthetic by Kant on the grounds that they were interested.

The second way Savile considers of linking our engagement

with the favoured class of subject matters with pleasure is whereby the expression of certain subject matters in works of art is naturally found to be pleasing on its own account, and that we have as a result reason to cultivate our natural sensitivity so that we are extensively pleased by the right cases. Savile's problem here is that there is too loose a bond between the thoughts the ideas express and the pleasure we take in them: we take pleasure in the ideas in their own right and not because of the fact that they satisfy a need in us. Savile writes of the second way: "[C]ultivation of pleasures that start off by being merely associated with objects which we ought to engage with may very well not generate pleasures of which the same could be reliably said."<sup>9</sup> If one is pleased by contemplating a theme of the favoured class in its own right, there is no reason why one should not equally be pleased by one of the wrong sort and cultivate one's taste in the wrong manner. What guides Savile in his criticisms of the second way is a clear conception of and commitment to a favoured class of subject matters, just those which Kant lists. But, while allowing that Savile has carried over this normative perspective from Kant, we need not share it: there are at least two alternative possibilities open here. One is that even cultivation of a taste which takes pleasure in art that articulates ideas frowned upon by Kant and Savile is nonetheless a genuine aesthetic sensibility that meets the disinterestedness requirement: one would be taking pleasure in such objects and ideas for their own sake and, while this would be bad taste for Kant and Savile, what one would have acquired by repeated contemplation of these objects and ideas would be a faculty of taste, and perhaps a very discriminating one, all the same. That is to say that there is a problem with using the normative notion of what constitutes a proper aesthetic idea to define the experience of the beautiful, or genuine aesthetic

experience. Unless an argument is presented to show why we should agree to the list of ideas that Kant proposes and Savile seconds, we are confronted with mere assertion and thus are not compelled to reject the second way on the grounds Savile suggests. The argument is that it is only these favoured ideas that provide mental stimulation and satisfy our spiritual needs. There will be disputes in matters of taste, but at least some of those disputes will concern those who have not acquired taste in the sense that Kant specifies arguing with those who have acquired such taste; the former arguing that works of art other than those featured in the canon chosen by those who have acquired taste also provide stimulation and satisfy spiritual needs, but stimulation and needs of a very different kind from those provided by works of art venerated by those who have taste.

The second possibility is that aesthetic experience need not be marked by an engagement with ideas. This, indeed, is a general problem for Savile's reconstruction of Kant's Critique of Judgement and, as we have seen above, gives support to Miall's contention that the third Critique is disunited. For, in the first analytic, the paradigms of the beautiful - roses, wallpaper, crustacea - are not thought of as articulating aesthetic ideas or treating themes (which is not the same as saying that they *could* not do so). It may be true that the most important, or valuable, works of art are those which satisfy certain spiritual needs, and that gives us a reason to cultivate a taste for such works. However, that does not provide a reason for cultivating taste in all beautiful works of art: there is no obvious spiritual need that is always met by pleasurably contemplating beautiful works of art. Still less is it likely to be said that contemplating such things offers the kind of mental stimulation that Kant suggests is characteristic of our engagement with aesthetic ideas.

Savile's third way is an attempt to satisfy the disinterestedness criterion and to ensure that we cultivate taste on the basis of the favoured class of aesthetic ideas. He suggests: "[T]he exploration of the thoughts that we need, and engagements with the [aesthetic] ideas that embody them, is itself of its very nature pleasurable. That is, there is no way of taking them into ourselves as fruitful which we will fail to find providing us with pleasure in the object that presents them to us."<sup>10</sup>

The key problem for Savile's third way seems to be the use of the favoured aesthetic ideas that supposedly satisfy spiritual needs to provide a criterion of what is beautiful. We have already noted that even by Kant's examples there are some cases of aesthetic experience where we are not engaged with aesthetic ideas and these throw up counter examples for Savile's project. If no such spiritual need is met in the contemplation of all works of art, this is problematic for Kant's account of the interest that we have in the beautiful. For, as we have argued, it is not plausible to suggest that our interest in the beautiful is typically concerned with sociability, and we have found Kant's account of the intellectual interest in the beautiful unsatisfactory, too. Thus, Kant needs another account for the interest we have in the beautiful that will give a good reason for cultivating taste in beautiful things. But, if that interest is couched solely in terms of spiritual needs that account will not be satisfactory, since in some cases we derive disinterested pleasure from beautiful things even though they do not offer spiritual rewards.

Thus, a beautiful rose need offer no spiritual satisfaction or mental stimulation for it to be subject to a genuine judgment of taste. All that is required is that it delights disinterestedly because of its contemplated form. The general problem for the use of the engagement with certain ideas which satisfy spiritual needs to

provide a compelling reason why we should cultivate taste is that taste is often manifested by the delight that is taken in beautiful objects that do not express such ideas but are nonetheless disinterestedly pleasing. It is surely a mistake to suppose that it can be a criterion of beauty that a work of art or a natural beauty express aesthetic ideas (as Kant, as we have seen, explicitly supposes), and that, as a result of the spiritual rewards contemplating these works and objects offers, that we are obliged to cultivate, or at least, given a strong reason for cultivating taste. Rather, it seems more promising to assert that, of all beautiful works of art and natural objects, we should cultivate a taste for those that deal with certain themes or subject matters which are expressed in such a way in the work or object that we cannot find them other than pleasing and spiritually rewarding. These are not the only works or objects that we will take to be beautiful, but they will be the only ones that we find offer a reason for us to cultivate a taste in them; and that reason will be the spiritual rewards they offer. That is, Savile's third way of forging the connection between ideas and interest could serve to provide a criterion of aesthetic value rather than a criterion of beauty: those who have acquired taste will value more highly those works and objects that offer spiritual rewards than such objects as roses, wallpaper and crustacea which offer mere disinterested delight.

This leaves the problem of why we should cultivate taste in those beautiful objects that offer mere disinterested delight to those who contemplate them. The answer may well be that we have no compelling reason other than the prospect of the pleasure that those objects offer.

#### iv) Conclusion

We have found neither Kant's suggestion that sociability is a good reason for cultivating taste nor his suggestion that the development of a good moral character is aided by the cultivation of taste to be compelling. Furthermore, we have argued that these reasons are inadequate to explain our interest in the beautiful. We considered the suggestion developed by Savile that spiritual needs will be met by the contemplation of beautiful things and that that provided a strong reason to cultivate taste. However, we argued that it cannot be a criterion of beauty that a thing satisfies spiritual needs or offers mental stimulation to those who have cultivated taste.

Notes on Chapter 7

1. Kant, op. cit., p.154.
2. Ibid., p.155.
3. Ibid., p.159.
4. Savile, op. cit., Aesthetic Reconstructions, footnote, p.164.
5. Scruton, op. cit., p.88.
6. Ibid., p.88.
7. Michael McGhee, 'A Fat Worm of Error?', British Journal of Aesthetics, volume 31, No.3, 1991, p.226.
8. Jerrold Levinson, 'Aesthetic Pleasure', in A Companion to Aesthetics, ed. Cooper, op. cit., p334.
9. Savile, op. cit., Aesthetic Reconstructions, p.176.
10. Ibid., p.176.

### Summary conclusion

This thesis has explored some of the failings of Kantian aesthetics, both as they have emerged in the Critique of Judgment and in the writings of commentators on that book. While we have not found fault with the suggestion that the judgment of taste is properly disinterested, we have found it to be unconvincing that this criterion of the judgment of taste can be used to demarcate that judgment from the judgment of agreeableness. However, we found that, considered together, the four criteria Kant uses to forge that distinction were successful in achieving that aim - with the exception for what we have called contemplative sensual pleasures that are taken in the form of their objects. For Kant, these pleasures are either inconceivable or agreeable - certainly he does not consider the possibility of contemplative, non-appetitive sensual pleasures in the Critique of Judgment. For him, the latter could not count as pleasures taken in the beautiful, and we have agreed with him in that respect during the thesis - chiefly for the reason that the notion of calling such things as wine or good food beautiful is contrary to our usage of that term. At the end of chapter 5, we concluded that if the criterion of necessity that Kant uses to forge the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful implied that only spiritually enriching pleasures could count as pleasures taken in the beautiful, then such contemplative sensual pleasures would not be ones taken in beautiful things, nor would they ground the genuine judgment of taste. However, in the following chapters we concluded that it was not necessary for the pleasure one takes in a thing to be spiritually enriching for it to ground the genuine judgment of taste. As a result, such contemplative sensual pleasures stand as a counter example to Kant's attempt to distinguish the beautiful from the agreeable.



We have also found the distinction between free and dependent beauty to be incoherent. As much of what Kant writes about the nature of art depends on the coherence of a notion of dependent beauty, this is a disturbing failing in his aesthetics.

At the end of the last chapter, we concluded that neither of Kant's candidates for the interest that may combine with the properly disinterested judgment of taste were necessary in order to explain why we acquire taste. The candidate that Kant does not consider is that, sometimes, we cultivate taste in the hope of deepening and prolonging our pleasure in beautiful things.

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