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KANT'S THEORY OF ÆSTHETICS

IN spite of the rapid growth and development of the theory of æsthetics in recent years, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* remains one of the most significant single contributions which has ever been made to æsthetic theory. This fact is often lost to sight because this work is usually regarded as only a part of his complete system of thought; but it has been of utmost importance in the history of æsthetics, and the germs even of some of the more recent developments in æsthetics can be found in it. For example, the central theses both of Santayana's doctrine and of Croce's are clearly stated in the *Critique of Judgment*.

And yet, many puzzling questions arise from a study of Kant's theory of æsthetics. Why is it necessary for him to state his doctrine in paradoxes? And why did he think it necessary to change the meaning of the *æsthetic* from the meaning which he had given in the *Critique of Pure Reason*? There Kant had used the word to mean concerned with perception (*Anschauung*—perceptual intuition). . . He noted that it was sometimes used concerning questions of taste, but he thought it advisable to drop that use for one nearer the etymology.¹ But in the *Critique of Judgment* he uses *æsthetic* in the way that he had earlier thought inadvisable: his æsthetics here is an investigation of the judgment of taste. The ground of the judgment of taste is subjectively determined, and Kant consistently uses the word æsthetic to mean subjective: referred to the subject and its feeling of pleasure and pain.

But it is not necessary on Kant's own basis for him to change the meaning of the word æsthetic from *perceptual* to *subjective*. The earlier meaning is still fundamental in the *Critique of Judgment* and the present paper will endeavor to point out that the change is directly due to a fundamental confusion between value and evaluation, which in turn results from Kant's approach to æsthetics as a means of effecting a synthesis between his other two Critiques.

¹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, Müller's trans., 2d ed., p. 17.

I

The first two Critiques had revealed realms between which "an immeasurable gulf is fixed"; and yet there must be some ground of unity or of synthesis of the two.² Kant attempted to supply this synthesis in the *Critique of Judgment*. The special investigation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is the concepts of the understanding, and it reveals the realm of nature. That of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is the ideas of reason, and it reveals the realm of freedom. Judgment is a mediating link between the understanding and the reason, and if *a priori* principles of judgment can be found, these will afford the ground of the needed synthesis; the realms of nature and of freedom can be exhibited in harmony with each other. The critical investigation which is to disclose the *a priori* principles in judgment, and to discover whether they are objective or subjective, constitutive or regulative is best served by the consideration of "those judgments that we call æsthetical", that is, the judgments of taste.³

The importance of Kant's theory of æsthetics lies in the fact that it lays the foundations for a complete and adequate demarcation of the æsthetic experience from the intellectual by showing that the æsthetic is what pleases without a concept (or the intervention of a mediating idea);⁴ and from the moral by showing that the æsthetic is what pleases without desire.⁵ Kant also shows that the æsthetic experience always involves the apprehension of form, and form is the unity in a manifold.⁶ The apprehension of form is immediately pleasing, but the pleasure is regarded not as a merely subjective state, but as if it were a part of the object.⁷ It is true that he holds the apprehension of beauty to be a judgment, but he is thoroughly aware that it is not intellectual. The

² Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, Bernard's translation, p. 13. All the page references in this paper not otherwise assigned are to the *Critique of Judgment*, Bernard's translation, second edition, London, 1914. Although I sometimes depart from Bernard, comparison with the German can readily be made from the page references to Bernard.

³ See pp. 2, 3 and 4 of the Preface.

⁴ P. 67.

⁵ P. 55.

⁶ Pp. 73-76.

⁷ Pp. 33, 56.

judgment of taste absolutely is not a logical judgment.⁸ Yet, because of his method of approach to æsthetics, after intellectual considerations have been removed they are introduced again by the back door.

This fact calls for a thorough investigation and criticism of Kant's method. In the first place, he divides all the faculties of the mind into three groups: faculties of knowledge (or cognition, *Erkenntnisvermögen*), faculties of desire, and faculties of feeling. Then he subdivides the faculties of knowledge into three parts: understanding, reason and judgment. Each of these faculties of knowledge gives knowledge of one of the main groups: the understanding gives knowledge of knowledge, the reason gives knowledge of desire, and the reflective judgment, when æsthetical, gives knowledge concerning the feeling of pleasure and pain.⁹

Understanding, reason and judgment are coördinate faculties of cognition. The investigation of these three faculties gives rise to three Critiques, and as the faculties are coördinate, the Critiques proceed according to parallel methods. The fundamental problem of each is to find the *a priori* element which is involved in the use of the faculty it is investigating. According to Kant there is an *a priori* element in every kind of knowledge. This is what makes the synthesis of knowledge possible. Understanding, reason and judgment all are cognitive faculties, so the exercise of each must involve some *a priori* principles. Consequently, the Critiques which disclose the *a priori* principles should, in each case, proceed in the same manner. This parallelism of method extends throughout the general plan of each Critique.

II

This is not a good method of procedure. It is based upon a faculty psychology which assumes that the three Critiques are investigations of parallel subject-matter. But they are not. Intellectual activities are different from valuing activities: cognition

⁸ Kant continually insists on this. Among various passages, see especially pp. 80 and 157, 158.

⁹ Pp. 15-17 and 42. There may well be grave doubt that this division is anything but a schematical device (despite the footnote on p. 42), and that it is even consistent with other Kantian analyses. But this criticism will not be followed up in this paper.

is not valuing, nor is valuing cognition. Both of the later Critiques are investigations of values. One might expect to find a degree of similarity of method in two theories of value, but to treat of values by a method parallel to the treatment of knowledge will inevitably result in confusion.

Kant's method causes the intrusion of intellectualism into his theory, as it would into any theory of æsthetics. For Kant, the apprehension of beauty is a result of the exercise of judgment. Judgment is, for him, a cognitive faculty, *i.e.* it is intellectual. Judgment is the subsumption of a particular under a universal.¹⁰ Of course this is intellectual, because it involves activities of the understanding. But although the apprehension of beauty is a judgment for Kant, he is aware of the fact that it is not intellectual, so he has recourse to the "reflective judgment", or the subsumption of a particular which is given under a universal which is not given (*i.e.* of which we are not aware when we are making the judgment).¹¹ He holds that no æsthetically significant representation (*Vorstellung*) can be produced without the coöperation of the understanding.¹² The form of an object of perception (*Anschauung*) cannot be apprehended without the reflective judgment.¹³ But the cognition involved in this judgment is only *cognition in*

¹⁰ P. 17.

¹¹ P. 18. The reflective judgment may be a chimera. No direct evidence is given for it, and it is assumed or "presupposed" to account for the awareness of a particular (for which no universal is given) as pleasant. Kant holds that the particular must be thought in the unity of a "thoroughly connected experience" to account for the pleasure taken in its apprehension. See p. 24. It is difficult to interpret Kant upon the point: can there be any awareness of particulars outside of a thoroughly connected experience? This passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (p. 75, Müller's trans., 2d ed.) indicates that there can: "It cannot be denied that phenomena (Kant would have said *Vorstellungen* instead of *Erscheinungen* in the language of the problem of the *Critique of Judgment*) may be given in intuition (*Anschauung*) without the functions of the understanding." If there can be direct apprehension of perceptual data without the functioning of the understanding, and if the pleasantness of such apprehension can be accounted for directly, then the reflective judgment is an unnecessary assumption. If the reflective judgment is chimerical, there is no basis for anything *a priori* in the æsthetic experience, for the "deduction" of the *a priori* principle rests on the reflective judgment. See pp. 22-24, 152-153, 161-165. This, possibly, is only another indication that the æsthetic experience is not a kind of knowledge and has no connection with the understanding.

¹² P. 64.

¹³ P. 32.

general. The understanding is not determined by a definite concept, so is in *free play*. The harmonious union of the imagination with the understanding in free play gives the representation which is the object of the judgment of taste.¹⁴

The universal concept which makes the reflective judgment possible appears in the judgment of taste (the appreciation of beauty) not as a concept, but only as a feeling.¹⁵ In consequence of this, Kant says that the judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment. He is led to believe that although judgment in general is cognitive, the judgment of taste is not cognitive because in it the concept appears only in a disguised form. But at the same time that he says that the æsthetic judgment is not cognitive, he says that the use of the understanding, in harmony with the imagination, is involved in it.¹⁶ For Kant, there is always a concept at the bottom of the experience of beauty even if that concept is concealed.¹⁷

It is the business of the *Critique* to find this concept and display it although it never enters into conscious experience. Kant finds it to be the concept of purposiveness, but there is no definite cognition of any purpose, there is only the form of purposiveness. This is what he means by purposiveness without purpose.¹⁸ A beautiful object is always represented under the form of purposiveness, but there is no definite purpose, only the general purposiveness of its adaptability to the powers of perception. "Natural beauty brings with it a purposiveness in its form by which the object seems to be, as it were, pre-adapted to our judgment."¹⁹ The consciousness of this "formal purposiveness in the play of the subject's cognitive powers, in a representation in which an object is given" is a feeling—is æsthetic pleasure.²⁰ "This pleasure accompanies the ordinary apprehension of an object by the imagination, as faculty of intuition in relation with the understanding, as faculty of concepts."²¹ To feel the pleasure is "merely to per-

¹⁴ P. 64.

¹⁵ Pp. 65, 66. Kant in this passage uses *sensation* in the sense of feeling. See p. 49.

¹⁶ Compare pp. 32, 64, 162, 169.

¹⁷ P. 36.

¹⁸ Pp. 68, 69.

¹⁹ P. 103.

²⁰ P. 71.

²¹ P. 169.

ceive (*wahrzunehmen*) the accordance of the representation (*Vorstellung*) with the harmonious (*subjektive-zweckmässigen*) activity of both cognitive faculties (*i.e.* imagination and understanding) in their freedom.”²²

III

This, Kant's explanation of æsthetic pleasure, is thoroughly intellectualistic. It involves activities of the understanding (though disguised). A concept (though unrecognized) lies at the bottom of it. Kant himself says that the pleasure is “referred to concepts although indeterminate ones.”²³ The feeling of pleasure is based on a judgment though Kant insists that this is a non-cognitive judgment because the universal concept under which the given particular (a representation, *Vorstellung*) is subsumed is not given. Kant's whole method of approaching the problems of æsthetics makes it impossible for him to keep his theory free from intellectualism. Although it is clear that he is aware that the æsthetic experience is not intellectual, he describes it in intellectualistic terms.

The difficulty here is much deeper than a mere choice of terminology. There is a fundamental confusion lying at the base of his theory, due to his method of approach. It is the confusion between the apprehension of beauty and the judgment concerning this apprehension, *i.e.* the confusion between value and evaluation. The distinction between the immediate apprehension of beauty and the knowledge of this apprehension is of utmost importance to a theory of æsthetics. But Kant did not see the distinction, for he was interested in the æsthetic experience not primarily for the purpose of explaining it on its own account, but because he thought he saw in it the possibility of effecting a theoretical synthesis between the realms of nature and of freedom. If, however, a theory of æsthetics is to be adequate *as æsthetics*, it must take its departure from the æsthetic experience, not from some ulterior interest.

The æsthetic experience is an experience of value. Beauty is an æsthetic value. Value is immediately apprehended, not mediately as the result of intellectual processes (even though these be disguised), so the apprehension of value is not an intellectual or

²² *Ibid.*

²³ P. 101.

cognitive matter. But it is possible to have knowledge concerning this apprehension. One may know that he has an immediate experience of value. In fact, it may be that such knowledge is an invariable accompaniment of the immediate apprehension, but whether it is or not, it is something essentially different.²⁴ Such knowledge is embodied in judgments, and these judgments are, of course, cognitive and intellectual. They are *evaluations*. An evaluation is a judgment concerning values or valuings. All judgments are propositional in nature, and evaluations are propositional. But immediate experiences of value are not. They are direct.

No theory of value can avoid confusion unless this distinction between valuing and evaluating is clearly discerned. This cannot be emphasized too strongly. A value and an evaluation are not at all the same. Although æsthetics is concerned with evaluations as well as with values, it is concerned with them only because they are about values. If values and evaluations are not carefully distinguished, cognition is inextricably confused with immediate apprehensions, because evaluations are cognitive. It behooves any theory of value which holds that cognition is in some measure fundamental to direct apprehension to point out the exact degree to which it is fundamental. The attempt to do this leads to paradoxes. Kant's paradoxes already have been indicated in this paper, and explicit attention will be called to them later.

The individual apprehends values, and he also makes evaluations. The most compelling cause for making evaluations is the necessity of comparing values, and all comparison involves judgment. Comparison is propositional in nature: it is a relation between terms. Some values are more valuable than others, and the judgment that one is more valuable than another involves the recognition, explicit or implicit, of a factor which causes the difference. This may be called the *evaluating factor*. It affords the measure of intensity of the value. More of it makes it more valuable, and less less valuable. The complete definition of any particular kind of value must include its evaluating factor, but this accounts only for the comparison of different degrees of value, it does not account for the fundamental difference between one kind of value and another (*e.g.* the difference between æsthetic and moral value).

²⁴ Any other view makes cognition and knowledge synonymous with consciousness, and therefore without special significance.

The evaluating factor for æsthetic value is the feeling of pleasure. Pleasure, when it is felt while the subject is in the æsthetic attitude, is the measure of the intensity of the æsthetic value which is being apprehended. The more pleasure in the æsthetic attitude, the greater the degree of value. The degree of pleasure affords the means of comparison of æsthetic values. Kant does not distinguish between the apprehension of æsthetic value and the comparison of different degrees of value, so he makes the evaluating factor fundamental in his definition of the word *æsthetic*.

Kant's uses of the word *æsthetic* have been noted already in this paper. In the *Critique of Judgment*, he defines the word to mean subjectively not objectively determined. He holds that it is subjectively determined because it is determined by the feeling of pleasure and pain.²⁵ In this way the evaluating factor becomes the predominant part of what he holds to be the fundamental meaning of the word *æsthetic*. But it is impossible that the word be adequately defined or used in this way, because before an evaluating factor can be determined for æsthetic value, this kind of value must be differentiated from other kinds: *i.e.* the fundamental meaning of the word *æsthetic* to which this evaluating factor is to be applied must be determined.

IV

It is not necessary on Kant's own basis for him to define *æsthetic* as *subjective*. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he had used the word to mean *perceptual* (perceptual intuition, *Anschauung*), and even in the *Critique of Judgment* this meaning is still fundamental despite his consistency in intending always to mean *subjective*. There are numerous passages which bear out this interpretation. What is subjective and concerned with feeling is æsthetic only in case it is also concerned with perception (*Anschauung*), for on page 133 Kant says that the absolutely good may be "subjectively judged according to the feeling that it inspires", and yet it is not æsthetic. In drawing the distinction between the æsthetical ideas and the rational ideas in section 49 he constantly refers the æsthetic to perception (*Anschauung*). He does this also in Remark I to the Solution of the Antinomy of Taste (section 57). On page

²⁵ P. 46.

47 he says that whether or not a thing is beautiful depends on "how we judge it by mere observation (perception or reflection)." ²⁶ On page 110 he says that the æsthetic estimation of magnitude "must consist in this, that we can immediately apprehend it in perception (*Anschauung*)."²⁶ In a footnote on page 90 he explains that certain instruments are not beautiful because "there is no immediate pleasure in the perception (*Anschauung*) of them." All knowledge "not contained in the immediate perception (*Anschauung*)" is declared, on page 138, to be irrelevant to the æsthetic judgment. On pages 82 and 83 he maintains that "the pleasure in beauty . . . is immediately bound up with the representation (*Vorstellung*) through which the object is given." And he declares, on page 159, that to judge an object beautiful "I must feel the pleasure immediately in the representation of the object." For Kant, the representation (*Vorstellung*) is given in the imagination, and the imagination is the faculty of intuition or perception.²⁷

Many other illustrations could be adduced to show that perceptual intuition (including the reproductive imagination) is fundamental to what is æsthetic for Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*. The question is, why did he think it necessary to change the meaning of the word to *subjective*? No answer is possible except that owing to his confusion between value and evaluation he considered it necessary to include the evaluating factor for æsthetic value within the fundamental definition of the word *æsthetic*. The fundamental use of the word included a reference to pleasure because he failed to note the place of pleasure in the experience of value. But it is obvious that the meaning of the word *æsthetic* must be established before the place of pleasure in the æsthetic experience can be determined.

It might be noted that the above interpretation of why Kant thought it necessary to change the meaning of the word *æsthetic*

²⁶ *Anschauung oder Reflexion*. By "Reflection", Kant refers to the reflective judgment, which, as pointed out above, is only his way of accounting for the pleasantness of the immediate apprehension of a particular for which no universal is given.

²⁷ See pp. 198, 96, and 169. It must be emphasized throughout that I am using the word *perception* only in the sense of *perceptual intuition*. Perception of fact, (*Wahrnehmung*) is clearly intellectual, and is a very different matter.

from *perceptual* to *subjective* is further borne out by the fact that he considered the æsthetic judgment to be the judgment of taste, and the judgment of taste is the judgment that an object is beautiful. But the meanings of the words *taste* and *beautiful* both have reference to the comparison of values, for taste commonly denotes preference and beauty denotes only a comparatively high degree of value. Therefore the meanings of these words involve the evaluating factor. The problems of evaluation are inextricably confused with the problems of value by Kant's method of approaching æsthetics.

In actual wording, Kant's theory of æsthetics often seems to be a series of paradoxes. Some of the most striking of these are: judgment which is not cognitive;²⁸ universal validity which is only subjective;²⁹ knowledge which is not intellectual;³⁰ purposiveness without purpose;³¹ necessity which is not apodictic;³² knowledge which is without a concept;³³ the imagination's free conformity to law.³⁴ There are many others, and these recur repeatedly. If these paradoxes are necessary in the exposition of Kant's system, there is some antecedent error or fundamental confusion. Many of them arise directly from the definition of *æsthetic* as *subjective*. Beauty is subjective to Kant, and yet he shows that in the explanation of the experience it must be treated as if it were objective.³⁵ It did not take his followers long to find out that it was as much objective as subjective to him, despite all his protests.

The presentation in perceptual intuition is fundamental to what is æsthetic in the *Critique of Judgment*, but Kant did not explicitly recognize the fact because he was pre-occupied by the problem of the synthesis of his other two Critiques. He gives as a description of the æsthetic "whatever we present in intuition (*Anschauung*) according to the precept of the judgment."³⁶ This precept

²⁸ P. 45.

²⁹ P. 60.

³⁰ P. 66.

³¹ P. 68.

³² P. 91.

³³ P. 96.

³⁴ P. 96.

³⁵ See pp. 56 and 58.

³⁶ P. 109. Italics mine.

is the subjective purposiveness of the judgment of taste. It is this subjectiveness which affords the grounds of synthesis between the realms of nature and of freedom. The doctrine of the subjective purposiveness of the æsthetic judgment (the apprehension of æsthetic value) is extremely important to Kant's theory of æsthetics considered as a *synthesis of his other two Critiques*, but it has no importance in his theory considered as a specific theory of æsthetics. It has even a place there only because of the fundamental confusion between value and evaluation which has caused the definition of *æsthetic* as *subjective*.

V

When one approaches the study of æsthetics from the standpoint of value, seeing that its central conception is a certain kind of value, all these confusions and paradoxes fall away. Value is neither subjective nor objective. But it is just as truly both subjective and objective. This is because the division into subjective and objective is not exhaustive. Value has a relational status, emerging from a relation between subject and object, therefore it seems to partake of some subjective conditions and some objective conditions. No confusions or paradoxes need arise from this situation if it is clearly realized.

The most fundamental meaning should be given to the word *æsthetic*. It must be fundamental enough adequately to differentiate æsthetic value from other kinds of value. Neither the meaning *feeling* nor the meaning *subjective* serve in the slightest to do this. The meaning *perceptual* (as it has been used in this paper) is wholly adequate. The word *æsthetic* cannot be taken to mean concerned with feeling, because æsthetic feelings must be distinguished from other kinds of feeling. It cannot be taken to mean *pleasure*, because there are other kinds of pleasure. That feeling or pleasure which is æsthetic is that which accompanies the intuition of perceptual data. Pleasure is the evaluating factor for æsthetic value, so is essential to a complete definition of *æsthetic value*, but is not essential to the fundamental meaning of the word *æsthetic*. Furthermore, the recognition of pleasure as the evaluating factor lays the basis for a satisfactory distinction between

positive and negative æsthetic values. Kant was never clear about the relation between beauty and ugliness, nor does his method of approaching the problems of æsthetics give him any basis for a solution.

Kant's doctrine, considered as a theory of æsthetics, is not wholly satisfactory. There are elements in it which are the result of profound theoretic insight into the conditions of the æsthetic experience, but there are also elements in it which are intrusions—elements which result from confusions and lead to paradoxes. The way to avoid the paradoxes is to analyze the doctrine and find the elements in it which lead to them. Then, by purging the system of these errors, a more satisfactory solution of the problems of æsthetics can be achieved. The paradoxes result from the intellectualistic elements in the theory, which, in turn, result from the confusion of immediate experiences of value with judgments about those experiences, *i.e.* the confusion of valuing with evaluating. The *Critique of Judgment*, as a theory of æsthetics, is the investigation of a certain kind of value, and hence the method which would be fruitful of adequate results would be the method which approaches the problem from the standpoint of value and not from the standpoint of a use of reason coördinate with the theoretical use and the practical use. By such a method, all the essentials of Kant's theory can be preserved, and the parts which lead to paradoxes can be eliminated.

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