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‘In General’
On the Epistemological Mission of Kant’s Doctrine of
Taste

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ABSTRACT. The fact that Kant’s critique of taste fails to sufficiently clarify the relation between aesthetic judging and cognition – which is the main source of the so-called ‘everything is beautiful’ problem – prompts the assumption that his aesthetics has more (or even more) to do with the theory experience than usually thought. My main claim is that his doctrine of taste should be read as a response to a danger evoked in the first *Critique*: the threat of (a kind of) solipsism. Judgments of taste, necessarily relying on the principle of common taste, thereby manifest a cognitive uniformity of subjects, as a condition of the objectivity of empirical judgments. I will show that this epistemological commitment leads to some distortions in the doctrine of taste, but also that Kant tacitly corrects his original approach in the theory of art.

1. Introduction

Friedrich Schelling makes a baffling remark in the Introduction to his (posthumously published) *The Philosophy of Art*, a series of lectures he first held in 1802/03 in Jena: ‘From the Kantians themselves one could naturally expect the most extreme tastelessness [...]. A multitude of people learned

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the Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment by heart and then presented it both from the lectern and in writing as aesthetics.' (Schelling, 1989, p. 12)² Unfortunately, Schelling does not explain why it is a mistake (unless he means 'tastelessness' as a praise) to present what we know to be Immanuel Kant's aesthetics – the first part of his third *Critique* – as aesthetics and how it should be presented instead. So I take myself the liberty to outline an answer of my own to this question. More specifically, I will argue that Kant's doctrine of taste is motivated – and distorted – by a certain epistemological interest.

That this doctrine does have to do with epistemology is nothing new, to be sure. I will not be concerned here with the (less than obviously successful) venture of the two Introductions to the third *Critique*, aimed at establishing the principle of the overall purposiveness of nature by connecting it to the subjective purposiveness of aesthetic reflection. But even apart from the Introductions, it has for long been clear that Kant's taste is closely related to the formation or acquisition of empirical concepts. Many of the books and papers dealing with this affinity come up against what has become to be called the 'everything is beautiful' problem. What I will *not* do in the present paper is try to provide yet another solution; chiefly because I do not think the problem can be solved within the framework of the doctrine of taste. I regard its persistence as an epiphenomenon of Kant's

² In Stott's translation the title reads as *Critique of Judgment*, whereas Schelling clearly refers only to the first part of the book, see Schelling, 1859, p. 362.

decision to tie aesthetic judging to 'cognition in general' (section 2). Then I show that the first *Critique* evokes the danger of (a kind of) solipsism, without being able to fend it off (3). My main claim is that the doctrine of taste, with its central notion of 'cognition in general', is a response to this threat: On the surface, a judgment of taste requires common sense as a principle of aesthetic consensus, yet what its true accomplishment is – what makes it so valuable for the transcendental theory of experience – is that the common sense it requires is at the same time the uniformity of the cognizing subjects as such, a uniformity that must exist as the condition of the objectivity of judgments of experience, but which cannot be assumed other than aesthetically (4). Finally, I will indicate some shortcomings of the 'Analytic of the Beautiful', resulting from the epistemological utilization of taste, but also that Kant tacitly revises this approach in his theory of art (5).

2. 'From a Transcendental Point of View'

What I have chosen as the title of my paper is one Kant's favourite terms in his doctrine of taste. He uses it some fifty times, mostly in the phrase 'cognition in general'. It first occurs in §9, where Kant describes the tasteful harmony of the imagination and the understanding as a 'subjective relation suited to cognition in general', adding that 'any determinate cognition [...] always [!] rests on that relation as its subjective condition' (Kant, 2000, 5:

218).³ He repeats this several times, although never in exactly the same wording. This is where the 'everything is beautiful' problem stems from. Just briefly: If determinate cognition is 'always' conditioned by the subjective, pleasure-inducing harmony of the two faculties, then every object of determinate cognition must cause satisfaction and be found beautiful before it is subsumed under a concept (where 'before' means a structural or logical rather than temporal priority).

It is hard to imagine that Kant was not aware how close he came to declaring everything to be beautiful. If I were writing a treatise on taste and arrived at the verge of the conclusion stating the ubiquity of beauty, I would do my best to avert this outcome; not the least because if everything then nothing is beautiful, nothing excels. Remarkably, Kant is not exactly at pains to assure his readers that this is not what he means. At the end of §38 he even brings up the possibility of 'assum[ing] nature as a sum of objects of taste *a priori*', adding that this question 'is related to teleology' (5: 291). The 'Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment' does not come back to the question. But some five years earlier Kant had a positive answer: 'in the course of nature everything is beautiful' in the sense of being 'regular' (Kant, 2012, 25: 1378). This notion of beauty is not, properly speaking, an

³ With the sole exception of the *Jäsche Logic*, I will refer to Kant's works using the volume and page numbers of the German Academy Edition. References to the third *Critique* (Kant, 2000) will henceforth be made simply by volume and page numbers in brackets, where the volume number 20 indicates the First Introduction. In a few cases I have amended the text using Werner Pluhar's translation (Kant, 1987). Also, I sometimes omit the boldface emphases.

aesthetic one. Related to regularity, it seems to have more to do with the cognition of nature than with taste. But is this distinction really so sharp if aesthetic judging is conceived of in terms of 'cognition in general'?⁴

As a translator of Kant, I personally hate the German word for 'in general', *überhaupt*, because it can be rendered into Hungarian in three different ways that are not hundred percent equivalent. This bias aside, I do not know what 'cognition in general' means. It is the opposite of determinate or particular cognition, yes. But it looks as if Kant simply translated this logical or even just nominal opposition into a mental act, into something real that happens in us: aesthetic reflection is 'the free play of the powers of representation [...] for a cognition in general', a 'state of mind' in which the faculties 'agree with each other as is requisite for a *cognition in general*' (5: 217-18). How can you cognize in general *vis-à-vis* a particular object?

There are some other phrases reflecting various aspects of 'cognition in general'. We have (a) 'faculties of cognition in general' (5: 286,

⁴ 'Everything in nature, both in the lifeless and in the living world, takes place *according to rules*, although we are not always acquainted with these rules. – Water falls according to laws of gravity, and with animals locomotion also takes place according to rules. The fish in water, the bird in the air, move according to rules. The whole of nature in general is really nothing but a connection of appearances according to rules; and there is *no absence of rules* anywhere. If we believe we have found such a thing, then in this case we can only say that we are not acquainted with the rules.' (Kant, 1992, p. 527) These are the opening sentences of the *Jäsche Logic*. Waterfalls, (certain) fish and birds could just as well be examples of the beauty of nature. Three birds indeed are, see 5: 299, though here they do not fly.

translation corrected to plural), (b) 'a judgment in general' (5: 287), (c) 'the power of judgment in general' (5: 286 and *passim*), (d) a reflection of this faculty 'by means of which it strives to rise from intuitions to concepts in general' (20: 249), or (e) 'to bring the empirical intuition of [an] object under some concept in general (it is indeterminate which [*unbestimmt welchen*])' (20: 220), and (f) 'the lawfulness of the understanding in general' (5: 241). Kant apparently has difficulties explaining how the understanding, as the faculty of concepts, participates in a mental act that is by definition free of concepts. Determination, as he uses the term, means the application of concepts to intuitions. Aesthetic judging does not conceptualize its object, that is fine. But how does it follow from this that the understanding dissolves into an entity functioning in general? I am sure my understanding cannot work with *unbestimmt welchen* concepts. It is probably not by chance that Kant sometimes talks about the free play of the imagination, full stop.

But the difficulties do not stop here. Although Kant does not use the phrase 'imagination in general', he writes something very close to that: 'Taste, as a subjective power of judgment, contains a principle of subsumption, not of intuitions under *concepts*, but of the *faculty* of intuitions or presentations (i.e., of the imagination) under the *faculty* of concepts (i.e., the understanding).' (5: 287) With due (and true) respect, this is nonsense. There is no such thing as a reflection connecting the faculties *as* faculties. Try to imagine something in general, reflect on it in general and find it

agreeing with the lawfulness or the concepts of your understanding in general. The last quote was from the Deduction, and it is while reading this part of the doctrine of taste that it really becomes difficult to resist the impression that Kant regards aesthetic judging as the enactment of a mere form or structure, devoid of content or at least completely content-neutral. In §38, which is the deduction proper within the Deduction, he even mentions (g) 'the judging of a sensible object in general' (5: 290). This equals to the judging of whatever. Kant might be right in claiming that aesthetic judging is 'without any matter' in the specific sense that 'neither sensation nor concept' can serve as its determining ground (5: 290). But this is something else than depriving it of every content. The 'sole' factor that a judgment of taste takes 'into consideration' is 'the *formal condition* of the power of judgment' (5: 290, fn.).

The source of this extreme formalization is the 'transcendental point of view' from which 'the investigation of the faculty of taste, as the aesthetic power of judgment, is here undertaken' (5: 170). A transcendental inquiry abstracts from any particular content and highlights the constant forms that organize those contents. This was a viable method in the first *Critique*, as it yielded a set of mental forms: The categories could be given separately from any particular act of empirical cognition. The question is whether the same approach works in the case of taste. Kant thinks it does. That is the point of his distinction between the critique of taste as 'art' and the critique of taste as 'science', the latter being the 'transcendental critique'

(5: 286). But the reason why the power of judgment makes just a short appearance in the first *Critique* (before being forced into a transcendental role in which it loses its true self) is that there simply are no general rules for subsuming the particular under the general (see Kant, 1998 [henceforth *CPR*], A 132-36/B 171-75). The identification of taste with the subjective power of judgment implies that the same holds for it. The only option left for the 'transcendental critique' is to present the rule or form as happening in or, rather, *as* the particular act of judging the beautiful; or, conversely, to present the particular act as a form. And since the only form that can be said to inhere in every reflection on an intuition is the harmony of the imagination and the understanding as such, i.e., as unspecified to any intuitive or conceptual content, aesthetic judging is doomed to become 'cognition in general'.

A passage in the First Introduction shows how that occurs:

[S]ince in the mere reflection on a perception we are not dealing with a determinate concept, but are dealing only with the general rule for reflecting on a perception in behalf of the understanding, as a faculty of concepts, it can readily be seen that in a merely reflecting judgment imagination and understanding are considered in the relation to each other in which they must stand in the power of judgment in general, as compared with the relation in which they actually stand in the case of a given perception.

If, then, the form of a given object in empirical intuition is so

constituted that the *apprehension* of its manifold in the imagination agrees with the *presentation* of a concept of the understanding (though which concept be undetermined [*unbestimmt welches Begriffs*]), then in the mere reflection understanding and imagination mutually agree for the advancement of their business [...]. (20: 220-21, translation amended)

Kant's decision to take aesthetic judging to be a 'mere refection' is the key to why it takes place as a 'cognition in general'; I will return to this in section 5. What 'can readily be seen' in the passage is a confusion. The first sentence promises a comparison – and thereby suggests a difference – between the 'actual' and the 'general' relation of the faculties. But in the second, the difference disappears and the 'actual' relation becomes a phantom. No intuition can be found agreeing with the presentation of *unbestimmt welches Begriffs*. Or, alternatively, any intuition will present an unspecified concept.⁵

On a more benevolent reading, aesthetic judging is not itself a 'cognition in general'. The imagination has a specific content that is special as well in that it anticipates a concept in a way which is somehow exceptional, i.e., not common to all cognition. In §9 Kant mentions 'the

⁵ The beautiful has 'a form that contains precisely such a composition of the manifold as the imagination would design in harmony with the *lawfulness of the understanding* in general if it were left free by itself' (5: 240-41). Whatever I draw will never/always correspond to this unspecified lawfulness.

facilitated play [*erleichtertes Spiel*]’ of the imagination and the understanding and goes on to write that an intuitive

representation which, though singular and without comparison to others, nevertheless is in agreement with the conditions of the universality that constitutes the business of the understanding in general, brings the faculties of cognition into the well-proportioned disposition that we require for all cognition [...]. (5: 219, translation amended)

This is one of the few formulations that can be used to solve or at least alleviate the ‘everything is beautiful’ problem (and there is a similar one in the First Introduction, see 20: 223-24). The ‘well-proportioned disposition’, though required ‘for all cognition’, is still distinguished, for it occurs in a ‘facilitated’ manner. Hence aesthetic judging is not a mental operation that precedes all cognition, but one which eminently represents the relation underlying or conditioning all cognition: the fitting together of the imagination and the understanding. The comparison involved in aesthetic reflection is one between this fitting together as brought about by a particular intuition – but without it being subsumed under a concept – and as a general form pertaining to all cognition. It finds the promise of a concept, as it were.

It should be added, however, that such an explanation runs the risk of bringing the beautiful too close to the regular. After all, what could be more

conducive to that fitting together than an intuition whose manifold can be united by the imagination with the least possible effort and which thus poses the least possible difficulty for the understanding? And it should also be added that immediately before the sentence last quoted, Kant invalidates this reading in advance: 'an objective relation can only be thought, but insofar as it is subjective as far as its conditions are concerned it can still be sensed in its effect on the mind' (5: 219). This leaves a merely aspectual difference between aesthetic judging and objective cognition, and reinforces the constellation in which former is always the condition of the latter.

I do not want to commit myself either for or against the view that Kant's doctrine of taste implies that everything is beautiful. I simply leave open the question whether, on his premises, aesthetic judging is identical with or eminently representative of 'cognition of general', and whether, accordingly, the beautiful itself is identical with the object of cognition in general taken in a pre-objective mode, or 'something must lift [it] out of the endless succession of non-saying and empty objects' (Schiller, 2003, p. 161).⁶ There is a single moment that could change the game, but it is almost completely missing from the doctrine of taste; it relates to the question of 'mere reflection', so I shall come to talk about it in the final section. But let me note again how remarkable it is that Kant nowhere explicitly denies a consequence that sometimes appears so hard to avoid (namely, that

⁶ Given that Schiller's *Kallias*, written in 1793 (but published first only in 1847), is an attempt to critically reformulate Kant's aesthetics, he seems to be the first to realize the 'everything is beautiful' problem.

everything is beautiful). More broadly, it is remarkable that while he begins the 'Analytic of the Beautiful' with the warning that a 'judgment of taste is [...] not a cognitive judgment' (5: 203), the whole analysis is centred around there being a strong affinity between aesthetic judging and cognition, and Kant remains conspicuously vague about how exactly they differ, except that the former is subjective and general, whereas the latter is objective and determinate, a difference which easily translates into their being just the complementary sides of the same mental act. There are excellent interpretations aimed at disentangling the intricate relationship between aesthetic judging and cognition and at distinguishing the beautiful from the object of cognition.⁷ But, given that Kant is so truly vague about truly elementary issues, is it not possible to assume that it was, for some reason or other, not important for him to separate, or important for him not to (let) separate, what we intuitively think should be separated in an aesthetic theory?

3. Regarding 'the Difference among the Subjects'

In a relatively neglected chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, called 'On the Canon of Pure Reason', Kant makes a distinction between conviction

⁷ See Guyer, 1979 and 2005, Allison, 2001, Hughes, 2007, Ginsborg, 2015. The list could be much longer, but these are works no one can ignore. For an overview of debate around the 'everything is beautiful' problem (which includes the question concerning the possibility of ugliness, too), as well as for an attempt to solve it, see Küplen, 2015.

and persuasion. The latter is merely subjective.

Truth, however, rests upon agreement with the object, with regard to which, consequently, the judgments of every understanding must agree [...]. The touchstone of whether taking something to be true is conviction or mere persuasion is therefore, externally, the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true; for in that case there is at least a presumption that the ground of the agreement of all judgments, regardless of the difference among the subjects, rests on a common ground, namely the object. (*CPR* A 820-21/B 848-49)

We are in one of the last chapters of the first *Critique*. Kant has already said a few words on the formation of object-consciousness and the overall constitution of objectivity. Now he bumps into a problem that deserves to be called fatal: the threat of a kind of solipsism.⁸ As far as I know, he does not ever use the word 'solipsism' in epistemological context. But he does use a term that means the same: 'egoism'. Although, and this could be of some interest, the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* is his single published work in which he mentions egoism, otherwise he deals with it only in his university lectures.

In 1783 he characterizes it as follows:

⁸ Michela Massimi, 2017, also interprets the passage in terms of solipsism, suggesting a solution that builds on the regulative use of reason.

Egoism is when someone maintains that there is nothing present outside him, but rather everything that we see is mere illusion [...]. I cannot refute the egoist by experience, for this instructs us immediately only of our own existence. We do experience mediately that other things are there through the senses; but the egoist says that in these senses there lies only the ground by which we would become aware of appearances. But they would be nothing in themselves. (Kant, 1997, 29: 927)

Far be it from me to equate transcendental idealism with egoism. Yet in a crucial respect the two positions overlap. That what we 'become aware of' are 'appearances', 'nothing in themselves' for us, is something on which Kant agrees with the egoist. In his words: 'space and time' are the '*a priori* conditions under which alone things [can] be outer objects for you, which [viz. the objects] are nothing in themselves without these subjective conditions [...], in relation to which therefore all objects are mere appearances' (CPR A 48-9/B 66).

In the section on the fourth paralogism (deleted in the B edition) Kant argues at length to refute the combination of transcendental realism and empirical idealism. As I do not want to get lost in the circles of transcendental idealism, let me simply accept his claim that this 'doctrine removes all reservations about assuming the existence of matter based on the testimony of our mere self-consciousness' (CPR A 370). In this respect,

transcendental idealism (complemented by empirical realism) is the opposite of egoism.⁹ That is why I labelled the problem emerging in the above quote from the Canon chapter as *a kind of solipsism*. What is important here is the way in which one becomes aware of the existence of external objects. This happens through sensation or perception, 'perception' being nothing but 'sensation [...] applied to an object in general without determining it' (*CPR* A 374). What is 'really given' in space is just 'something real [...], or the material of all objects of outer intuition' (*CPR* A 375). Albeit, and this makes Kant's argument so difficult to follow, 'these external things – namely, matter in all its forms and alteration – are nothing but mere representations, i.e., representations in us' (*CPR* A 371).

What does all this have to do with the Canon passage? Kant's formulation seems unnecessarily complicated, even by his standards. Why does he not simply say that judgments are true if they agree with the object – which is the traditional correspondence or adequacy view of truth –, and that the agreement of the subjects is based on this 'common ground'? Why does he (have to) say that even the mere presumption of there being a common object requires the consensus 'of every human being'? Transcendental idealism seems to have an unexpected side effect.

The novelty of Kant's transcendental notion of truth is that objects are not given: they are made by the cognizing subjects. Not in a material sense,

⁹ For a detailed analysis, see Heidemann, 2011. See also his first book (Heidemann, 1998), dealing with Kant's idealism in the context of egoism.

to be sure, but formally, by means of the categories. These are mere forms of articulating and structuring perceptual data. They do not – because cannot – guarantee that the outcome of this structuring, i.e., experience, will be 'normal', orderly in terms of its content. Kant is well aware of this problem. He has three different solutions for it. None of them works, however. First, in the 1781 version of the Deduction of the categories he complements these mere forms by the principle of transcendental affinity, which roughly means that there is a material or contentwise regularity in the totality of appearances. By this, Kant introduces a further criterion of truth: coherence. Empirical judgments must not only correspond to their objects, they also must fit into a coherent whole of cognition. But the only source from which the principle of affinity could be drawn is the transcendental unity of apperception, which, however, being just a numerical identity, does not rule out disorderliness. Whereas I cannot think and, consequently, experience without the categories, I can synthesize in my mind contents that are – or seem to me – irreconcilable with what I have experienced before and what I am used to regard as normal.¹⁰ It is not surprising, then, that the B Deduction tries to make do without affinity.

The second solution – in fact a variation of the first – is the dream argument. In the first *Critique*, Kant wavers between two positions. According to the A Deduction, the categories are sufficient to distinguish experience from dream (see *CPR* A 112), which is obviously false, as they

¹⁰ See Westphal, 2004, especially pp. 110-115.

are mere forms. In another place he writes that it is empirical laws that distinguish the two (see *CPR* A 492/B 520-21), which is correct in itself, but the argument does not work, for the same reason as why the principle of affinity was illusory: I can tell a dream-like experience in categorial syntax without giving up the numerical identity of my self-consciousness.¹¹

Thirdly, Kant goes back to where the trouble began. In the 'Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic' he tries to revive, to a certain extent, the cosmological and theological ideas God. But the so-called regulative use of reason is too weak compared to what it should serve for. The idea that nature is to be regarded as a totality purposively ordered by a supreme intelligence (an idea that involves the affinity of appearances, too) is just a heuristic notion or principle. Of course, I must expect that the appearances will behave regularly, and must do my best to achieve coherence among experiences. But this self-regulation does not preclude chaos. (And there will be a fourth solution, too, a non-theological variation of third: the project carried out in the Introductions to the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.)

On the one hand, objects are made by means of the categories. On the other hand, they are made of perceptions, and perceptions are 'in us' in the emphatic sense that they are pre-objective representations. Kant seems to believe, at least for a while, that the categories are sufficient to orchestrate a synthesis of perceptions such that it results in the consciousness of an object

¹¹ The *Prolegomena* combines the two versions of the argument, see Kant, 2002, 4: 290.

that is necessarily the same for everyone. In the *Prolegomena* he develops a complete doctrine (dropped again in the B edition of the first *Critique*) to show how the categories transform judgments of perception into judgments of experience. Whereas the former 'do not require a pure concept of the understanding, but only the logical connection of perceptions in a thinking subject', the latter

always demand, in addition to the representations of sensory intuition, special *concepts originally generated in the understanding*, which are precisely what make the judgment of experience *objectively valid*.

All of our judgments are at first mere judgments of perception; they hold only for us, i.e., for our subject, and only afterwards do we give them a new relation, namely to an object, and intend that the judgment should also be valid at all times for us and for everyone else; for if a judgment agrees with an object, then all judgments of the same object must also agree with one another, and hence the objective validity of a judgment of experience signifies nothing other than its necessary universal validity. (Kant, 2002, 4: 298)

First, the requirement that there be, in the a case of judgments of perception, a 'logical connection of perceptions in a thinking subject' begs the problem, or a part of it, as it presupposes the orderliness of what can be perceived. In the absence of affinity (and God), this 'logicalness' is not warranted.

Second, even when perceptions become synthesized in the concept of

an object or in an objective judgment, what is thus created does not cease to be mind-dependent: 'external things' are still 'representations in us', as Kant himself said. A judgment of experience might want to be valid 'for everyone else', but poor 'thinking subject' cannot point at the object as an entity detached from her. And if I add up the two factors, the result is not exactly cheerful.

[C]onsider the following: If the sun shines on the stone, it becomes warm. This judgment is a mere judgment of perception and contains no necessity, however often I and others also have perceived this; the perceptions are only usually found so conjoined. But if I say: the sun *warms* the stone, then beyond the perception is added the understanding's concept of cause, which connects *necessarily* the concept of sunshine with that of heat, and the synthetic judgment becomes necessarily universally valid, hence objective, and changes from a perception into experience. (Kant, 2002, 4: 301, fn.)

But what if I do not perceive that the stone 'becomes warm' in the sunshine, while someone else does? There is no principle that could rule out this possibility. How shall we decide which one of us is right? 'Don't you know that a stone *must* become warm in the sunshine?' she will ask. Reply: 'No, I don't.' 'But don't you perceive that it is cold?' I will ask. Reply: 'No, I don't.' Standoff.

This is absurd, of course. I am not claiming that solipsism is a tenable

position. I just wanted to indicate that the problem emerging in the Canon chapter is a challenge that cannot be met within the framework of transcendental idealism, at least as it stands in the first *Critique*. What a subject reliably possesses are her perceptions. Perceptions provide 'something real [...], or the material of all objects of outer intuition', but this material is not yet articulated or processed in any way. It is up to the subject to transform it into objects. Whatever she produces this way will be and remain the product of her mind, even though she sets it against herself (objects/*Gegenstände* are the results of *obiecere/Entgegenstellen*; in a passage of the 'Second Analogy' Kant uses the word *Gegenverhältnis*, translated as 'contradistinction', for this, *CPR* A 191/B 236). And it is not only that she has no access to the object in itself, independently of her mind. She has no access to the minds of others, either. What the first person plural in the phrase 'representations in us' refers to is not a single universal ego, a supersubject, as it were, but a multitude of individual subjects. The categories might delineate the structure of human understanding as such, but the way people perceive individuates them.

In the light of these considerations, the Canon passage is not an incidental observation. On the contrary, it is a short but sharp account of what follows – maybe undesirably, yet inevitably – from transcendental idealism. If I may simplify the second sentence of the quote, the truth of an empirical judgment becomes dependent on 'the possibility of communicating it and finding it to be valid for the reason of every human

being'. It is only after its being found valid for everyone that you can make the 'presumption that the ground of the agreement of all judgments, regardless of the difference among the subjects, rests on a common ground, namely the object'. Objectivity is not simply mind-dependent: it turns out to be a function of intersubjectivity. Something is the same for everyone in its status as an object because it determines how everyone has to perceive it, and serves as an independent control instance for checking and, if necessary, correcting the judgments about it – this is, roughly speaking, the old way of seeing things. Something can be endowed with the status of an object if and only if everyone agrees on what it is – this is the new way.

That said, I do not know to what extent Kant realizes the turn. On the one hand, he seems to be clearly aware of it. Indeed, the *Prolegomena's* doctrine of the two types of judgments can be read as a (failed) response to the passage in question, for it tries to reverse the logical order and ground the consensus of the subjects on the object. On the other hand, the scenario described in the passage – in both editions of the first *Critique*, i.e., both before and after the *Prolegomena* – is obviously unachievable. That the universal consensus yields no more than 'a presumption' concerning the existence of the object as a 'common ground' is an inconvenience transcendental idealism must learn to live with. The only way to get rid of it would be a kind of suicide: Kant would have to return to the mind-independence of objects (as given in themselves), which is certainly not an option for him.

But even the 'presumption' seems to be hopelessly distant. Suppose we somehow manage to agree that the stone is warm(ed by the sun). In order to be able to presume that our agreement rests on the object, we should reach out to 'every human being'. Quite a task, not the least because some human beings are already dead, while others are yet to be born. And even if we managed to poll all of them and find a truly universal consensus concerning the stone, this is just one out of, well, many objects (or object-wannabes). Kant arrives at an insight truly entailed in transcendental idealism, but at the same time he evokes a danger against which he has no weapon in his transcendental arsenal: the danger that what is supposed be a common world of objects, one which is the same for everyone, falls apart into an uncontrollable diversity of subjective views. So what shall critical philosophy do? It needs to find a better way to overcome 'the difference among the subjects', a solution more viable than that doubly endless poll.

4. 'Mankind in General'

There is a somewhat mysterious sentence in §17 of the third *Critique*:

The universal communicability of the sensation (of satisfaction or dissatisfaction), and indeed one that occurs without concepts, the unanimity, so far as possible, of all times and peoples about this feeling in the representation of certain objects: although weak and hardly sufficient for conjecture, this is the empirical criterion of the

derivation of a taste, confirmed by examples, from the common ground, deeply buried in all human beings, of unanimity in the judging of the forms [*der Formen*] under which objects are given to them. (5: 232-33, the definite article before 'forms' is my insertion.)

As far as I understand, Kant says that the aesthetic unanimity that can be empirically detected by looking at the 'examples' does not as such prove the existence of 'the common ground'. §17 is the last section of the Third Moment. The Fourth Moment is devoted to common sense. When making a judgment of taste, '[o]ne solicits assent from everyone else because one has a ground for it that is common to all' (5: 237). I surmise that this common ground is the same as the one mentioned in §17. If so, the function of the Fourth Moment is to provide a stronger-than-empirical argument for the common ground. And this ground has a role broader than just facilitating aesthetic consensus: it secures the 'unanimity in the judging of the forms under which objects are given'. Not beautiful things – objects (in general). In the Canon chapter, objects could only be presumed to serve as 'a common ground' on which 'the agreement of all judgments, regardless of the difference among the subjects, rests', and even this required an impossible operation: that of *actually* 'communicating' empirical judgments all over the world and 'finding [them] to be valid for the reason of every human being'. Now the common ground gets translocated into 'all human beings'. It is 'deeply buried' in them – let it be brought to light.

Kant takes it for granted that judgments of taste demand universal and

necessary assent – that this demand defines them as judgments of taste, not only for the philosopher, but also for all who happen to find something beautiful (see 5: 214). I think he is wrong on that, although his insistence on the strict universality of taste can be regarded as a heightened version of a view that was not uncommon in the 18th century. '[A] pleasure to be felt and at the same time to be presented *a priori* as proper for mankind in general' (5: 301, *cf.* 5: 356) can have nothing to do with what is culturally conditioned and specific. Kant dismisses empirical aesthetics because it remains confined to 'these and those circumstances of place and society' (20: 237). But this is where taste usually lives, and it will not necessarily be grateful if taken to a transcendental adventure. Kant's insistence on its universality could be made plausible by another conviction on his part – were this not even more problematic. He sees natural beauty as the paradigm case of beauty and the judging of natural beauty as the eminent function of taste. This is atypical even in the 18th century. The so-called pure taste preferred by Kant is a slightly (or not so slightly) anachronistic faculty. Fixated on natural beauty, it is unable to deal with anything that is intentionally meaningful; 'designs *à la grecque*, foliage for borders or on wallpapers' are its favourite objects, for 'they do not represent anything' (5: 229). I have mentioned these two points because they relate to what I deem to be the epistemological mission of Kant's doctrine of taste. In this respect, nature is superior to art (and anything man-made), and universality is a must. Indeed, Kant's sole argument for why aesthetic judging must be (or

have to do with) 'cognition in general' is that this alone makes its subjective universality possible (see 5: 217).

§40 identifies taste with common sense or, more precisely, with 'a kind of *sensus communis*' (5: 293). The other kind is the 'common human understanding' (5: 293). It appears in the *Prolegomena* as well, where it has another name, too: *gesunder Menschenverstand* ('sound common sense' in the English translation).¹² Kant fiercely criticizes the advocates of this common sense, i.e., the Scottish School of Common Sense, saying what they claim to be immediately certain knowledge lacks universality and necessity, and cannot be used to beat off David Hume's attack on metaphysics. Transcendental philosophy alone can save the concept of causality and other *a priori* concepts (see Kant, 2002, 4: 369-71 and 258-60).

The aesthetic common sense is a newly found one, therefore, not a revival of the 'sound common sense'. Its function is different, too, though not as one might expect. 'Whether one has good reason to presuppose a common sense' asks the title of §21 (5: 238). As Kant has already introduced common sense as a subjective principle without which no judgment of taste can be made, one has good reason to hope the answer will be positive. Surprisingly, however, §21 does not even mention taste.

¹² To make the picture even more colourful, the Hungarian equivalent of this common taste translates as 'sober reason'.

Cognitions and judgments must, together with the conviction that accompanies them, be able to be universally communicated, for otherwise they would have no correspondence with the object: they would all be a merely subjective play of the powers of representation, just as skepticism insists. (5: 238)

This opening sentence and, accordingly, the whole section can be read in two ways. First, the words 'must' and 'otherwise' might mean that cognitions *are* in fact universally communicable, *since* they correspond with their objects. In this case, the section's argument is an external support, as it were, for the theory of taste, in that it demonstrates the existence of a common sense by taking as *faits accomplis* both the 'correspondence with the object' and the universal communicability of cognitions as *ensuing* from the correspondence. But such a reading has to disregard that it is exactly this priority of the object that Kant denies in the Canon chapter of the first *Critique*. With some generosity, I take 'skepticism' to be referring to what I above called a kind of solipsism. The latter, too, translates into a 'a merely subjective play' in that the subjective objectifications of perceptual data do not produce an independent and binding objectivity (unless and until 'every human being' agrees on everything). My claim, then, is that the section must be read the other way round: It is high time to make sure there is a common sense as a medium that facilitates the universal communicability of cognitions, 'for otherwise' they will never have objective reference. And this is where taste has a crucial role to play.

Although not mentioned by its civilian name, taste does appear in the section: as 'cognition in general':

[I]f cognitions are to be able to be communicated, then the mental state, i.e., the disposition of the cognitive powers for a cognition in general, and indeed that proportion which is suitable for making cognition out of a representation (whereby an object is given to us) must also be capable of being universally communicated; for without this [*viz.* without this proportion: *ohne diese*], as the subjective condition of cognizing, the cognition, as an effect, could not arise. (5: 238)

The way Kant formulates this step of the argument is telling. He does not say that particular cognitions *are* universally communicable, hence the same must be true of cognition in general. On the contrary: the universal communicability of cognitions, which, according to the Canon passage, precedes and conditions objectivity, requires that 'cognition in general' be universally communicable. Given that 'cognition in general' is, roughly speaking, synonymous to aesthetic judging, this means that objectivity will depend on taste.

To make matters more complicated, the following steps of the argument can be taken as a proof both for and against the 'everything is beautiful' consequence:

And this [the cognizing] actually happens every time when, by means of the senses, a given object brings the imagination into activity for the synthesis of the manifold, while the imagination brings the understanding into activity for the unification of the manifold into concepts. But this disposition of the cognitive powers has a different proportion depending on the difference of the objects that are given. Nevertheless, there must be one in which this inner relationship is optimal for the animation of both powers of the mind (the one through the other) with respect to cognition (of given objects) in general; and this disposition cannot be determined except through the feeling (not by concepts). (5: 238-39)

That the disposition is proportioned differently due to 'the difference of the objects' and that there is a distinguished proportion 'optimal' for the play of the faculties 'with respect to cognition [...] in general' seems to suggest that beautiful objects are just a segment of objects in general. But this implies that cognition *in general*, presented three sentences earlier as the proportion that serves 'as the subjective condition of cognizing', is restricted to *certain* objects, which is unlikely. From this perspective, the last sentence of the quote reads like a reduction of the different proportions to one which is to be detected in every act of cognition. But for my purpose this ambiguity does not make a difference.

The conclusion is as follows:

Now since this disposition itself must be capable of being universally communicated, hence also the feeling of it (in the case of a given representation), but since the universal communicability of a feeling presupposes a common sense, the latter must be able to be assumed, and indeed without appeal to psychological observations, as the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition, which is assumed in every logic and every principle of cognition that is not skeptical. (5: 239)

To put it pointedly, common sense, introduced in the preceding sections as the principle of taste – and, not incidentally, to be identified with taste in §40 –, advances to a condition under which alone empirical cognition claiming objective validity is possible. This claim is a limited one, to be sure. As mentioned above, the mind-independence of objectivity is not an option for Kant; this would amount to annulling transcendental idealism. According to the Canon chapter, the most that can be done is to presume an object that is identical for everyone. But even this requires a universal intersubjective consensus, which, however, cannot be brought about by way of actual communication (for this would have to be an endless poll). It is taste that makes it indispensable, with its (alleged) claim to universal assent, to assume a common sense – one which, in mediating the aesthetic agreement of all subjects, provides for the universal communicability of cognitions, too.

Before I proceed, let me make a remark concerning the above duality,

namely, that common sense appears first as a principle of taste, then as taste itself. This uncertainty is justified due to what I mentioned in section 2. Identified with the subjective power of judgment, taste has no form or rule separable from its actual reflection. The same pertains here. Kant formulates this in a seemingly paradoxical yet very exact way in §18: aesthetic 'necessity [...] can only be called *exemplary*, i.e., a necessity of the assent of *all* to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce [*die nicht gegeben werden kann*]' (5: 237). Taste exemplifies a rule that cannot be given independently of its being exemplified. This might explain why Kant promises to answer later, but never answers an extremely long question formulated in §22, a question that concerns, among other things, whether 'common sense' is 'a constitutive principle of the possibility of experience' or just 'a regulative principle' (5: 240). The most likely answer is that it has an in-between status. (As far as the whole alternative is concerned, it must probably be left undecided, and probably because common sense is in a permanent *Werden*.)¹³

Be it as it may, the fact that common sense figures here as a 'principle of the possibility of experience' is in itself a proof that Kant's doctrine of taste is a genuine contribution to the theory of empirical cognition. Common sense did not yet exist in the first *Critique* as such a principle or 'as the necessary condition of the universal communicability of our cognition'.

¹³ For a comprehensive interpretation of common sense, extending over its historical and 'disciplinary' aspects, see Zhouhuang, 2016.

That it now exists is a feat achieved by taste and its transcendental doctrine. But what exactly is the trick? Why does Kant need this complicated game involving taste? Why does he not simply declare that the possibility of experience requires a common sense, so we are compelled to assume it?

First, doing so would amount to overtly acknowledging that the two editions of the first *Critique* and the *Prolegomena* did not sufficiently explain the possibility of experience. Second, and this is far more important, it is not that Kant overcomplicates a situation; the situation itself is unusually complicated. To begin with, a judgment of experience *is possible, to a certain extent*, without a common sense. What do I mean by that? A judgment of experience or a determinate cognition is always limited to a particular content and the particular way we cognize it. Further, it is limited in the sense that even though it might be meant to be universally valid, the actual consensus, if there is one, will extend to a limited number of people who get in touch with that content; for instance, to those who can touch that stone in the *Prolegomena* at least once in their lives (in sunshine), and, which is just as necessary, can share their views about it with each other. And how will this not so universal consensus come about? You will make your own judgment on the basis of what you must believe to exist independently of your representation, even though you are, or should be, aware that it does not exist like that. For how else could you expect that others agree with you? Or, for that matter, how else could you disagree with others? (Solipsism is a headache for the philosopher, primarily.) But the

lesson of the Canon chapter is that objectivity is a function of intersubjectivity and that the consensus among the subjects cannot be derived from an allegedly independent existence.

It is here that taste jumps in to save the day. An aesthetic judgment is not objective, it is in no way about an object and has no objective criteria for its validity. It is about something that goes on within the subject. And this mental event, although occasioned by a particular intuition, is in a specific sense not limited either to a particular content or to a particular way of cognizing. It has to do with 'cognition in general', is either identical with or eminently representative of (I am still noncommittal about this) what is the condition of each and every case of determinate objective cognition, regardless of its particular content: the subjective, pre-conceptual and pre-objective fitting together of the imagination and the understanding.¹⁴ Further, a judgment of taste is unlimited in the sense that it demands universal assent: it is made in the name of 'mankind in general'. On Kant's account, a judgment of taste has, on the one hand, no objective criteria to rely on, yet it must want to be universally valid, on the other. How can that be achieved? What the judging person senses to be going on within herself *hic et nunc* belongs to (in either of the two possible ways) the subjective condition of any determinate cognition. So she has no choice but to declare *this condition* to be universal, to be universally communicable, to be able to

¹⁴ For Kant, conceptual consciousness and object-consciousness are the same: "**object** [...] is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is **united**" (CPR B 137). Strictly speaking, this also means that the beautiful is not an object.

be shared by everyone.

In the *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, the paragraph after the passage quoted above begins with this sentence: 'Dualism (pluralism) is opposed to egoism' (Kant, 1997, 29: 928), the word *Pluralismus* being written over *Dualismus* in the manuscript. Indeed, both are appropriate. Dualism in the sense that transcendental idealism requires empirical realism. Pluralism as the recognition of the existence of others. But how will this multitude of subjects have a common world of objects? 'If the judgment of taste must not be counted [*gelten muss*] as *egoistic*, but necessarily [...] as *pluralistic*, then it must be grounded in some sort of *a priori* principle' (5: 278). Once again, the Canon chapter made objectivity a function of intersubjectivity. But it could not provide for the latter, except that it suggested an impossible procedure, that of actually finding empirical judgments valid for 'every human being'. A judgment of taste claims universal validity in the mode of intersubjectivity (Kant does not, of course, use the word). This requires common sense as a principle or medium. But just as aesthetic judging rises into the sphere of cognizing, so too common sense proves to be a principle that supports cognition. Aesthetic reflection can be directed only to the subjective conditions of the use of the power of judgment in general (which is restricted neither to the particular kind of sense nor to a particular concept of understanding), and thus to that subjective element that one can presuppose in all human beings (as requisite for possible cognitions in general), and a 'judgment of taste [...] asserts only that we are justified in

presupposing universally in every human being the same subjective conditions of the power of judgment that we find in ourselves' (5: 290).

This is not necessarily the first thing that would come to my mind if I, in writing a treatise on taste, began pondering about what exactly a judgment of taste asserts ('only'). Anyway, what Kant has found is a real transcendental *trouvaille*. Whereas you can make a judgment of experience without necessarily having to think that everyone else will perceive and objectify the given content in exactly the same way (you can just hope that), you cannot make a judgment of taste without consciously presupposing or exemplifying common sense as the uniformity of human cognitive constitution, the uniformity of everyone with respect to the way the mental faculties operate in 'cognition in general', i.e., both in aesthetic judging *and* in all cognition. Ultimately, a judgment of taste is the enactment or celebration of this uniformity, which *must*, at long last, be assumed *because* there has appeared on the scene a certain type of judgment, called the judgment of taste, that cannot be made other than manifesting it. Objectivity remains mind-dependent. But 'the difference among the subjects' that once threatened to block even the 'presumption' of a common world of objects is not a concern anymore for the transcendental theory of experience. In practical terms, there might still be cases in which the subjects disagree on what the object is. As a matter of principle, however, their difference has been overwritten by unanimity – thanks to taste.

(Although I said I would not be concerned with the two Introductions,

let me point out the structural similarity of the arguments employed there and in the doctrine of taste, respectively. After three failed attempts, Kant again tries to provide for the coherence of possible experiences. This coherence is, in itself, a human need. For this need to be fulfilled, nature must be purposive (ordered as if by intention). But a human need does not, as such, warrant a transcendental principle. Even if the purposiveness cannot be more than a subjective presupposition, in that it is not a condition constitutive of object-consciousness (and, consequently, of objects of possible experience), it must somehow gain in status. What makes a transcendental principle a transcendental principle is that a certain type of judgment is not possible without it. Aesthetic judging, as 'cognition in general', is subjectively purposive in the sense of an inner, i.e., mental, harmony. This harmony, however, entails the promise of conceptual object-consciousness, and this in a way not restricted to any particular cognition. A judgment of taste, since it necessarily claims universal validity, since this claim defines it as a judgment of taste, requires an *a priori* principle without which it would not be possible, and which thereby proves to be a transcendental principle. Unlike the doctrine of taste, where it is common sense that serves as such a principle, the Introductions ground the universality of judgments of taste on the principle of nature's purposiveness, which might at first seem surprising within one and same book – until you realize that 'cognition in general' is a master key. But even so, Kant has to conflate the two meanings of subjective purposiveness. Aesthetic reflection

is subjectively purposive in the sense of being a pre-objective mental state, whereas the principle of nature's purposiveness is itself subjective in its status, in contradistinction to the constitutivity of the categories.)

5. 'We Linger over the Contemplation of the Beautiful'

I mentioned in section 2 that there is a single moment, almost completely missing from the doctrine of taste, that could change the game with regard to the 'everything is beautiful' problem. I did not mean to say that this could help decide between whether aesthetic judging is identical with or just eminently representative of 'cognition in general'. As a matter of fact, I do not think it can be conceived of in terms of 'cognition in general'. One of the reasons that make me sceptical about the viability of Kant's doctrine of taste and unable to read it as aesthetics proper is that it fails to answer, even to ask, a crucial question. According to the 'General Remark' after the 'Analytic of the Sublime', '[t]he *beautiful* [...] requires the representation of a certain *quality* of the object, which also can be made intelligible and brought to concepts (although in the aesthetic judgment it is not brought to concepts)' (5: 266, translation amended). Question: Why is it not brought to concepts if it could be? Which is the same as asking why aesthetic judging is a mere reflection. Or as asking why it remains a 'cognition in general' instead of getting concretized into a determinate cognition.

Kant has an answer, to be sure: because it is 'without concepts' (5:

211 and *passim*). But this is just begging the question. In the First Moment, where Kant excludes the two (or three) types of interest from aesthetic reflection, he forgets to mention the interest of cognition, of mastering things by means of concepts. As if this were not at least as important as enjoying and utilizing them. Kant might be right in emphasizing that 'there is no transition from concepts to the feeling of pleasure' (5: 211). But this is not the point. Note well, I am not claiming that aesthetic theory should commit itself to the objectivity of aesthetic properties or values. It can choose a subject-oriented approach. 'In order to decide whether or not something is beautiful, we do not relate the representation by means of understanding to the object for cognition, but rather relate it by means of the imagination (perhaps combined with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure' (5: 203). This is the first sentence of the 'Analytic of the Beautiful'. The problem with it is that we (usually) do not proceed like that. We do not pick something 'in order to' make an aesthetic decision about it, and do not vow to relate its representation to the feeling.

To put it more comprehensibly, Kant presupposes a prior attitude on the part of the subject. As if she knew in advance that she was going to see something beautiful, and as if she had already made up her mind to abstain from applying empirical concepts and making objective judgments; or as if she were entering a museum when encountering natural beauty. In fact, Kant even stipulates such an attitude: if you are to make a judgment of taste,

you have to suspend your otherwise normal behaviour of turning perceptual representations into objects of experience. You have to leave your concepts in the cloakroom. (*Mutatis mutandis*, Kant does the same in the first half of the 'Analytic of the Sublime': the magnitude of an object which *is to be* judged as generating the feeling of the sublime must not be estimated mathematically, by concepts, because in this case the imagination has no opportunity to collapse).

The transcendental doctrine of taste is seriously imperfect in providing what could be called a phenomenology of aesthetic experience. And I suspect that this has to do with its epistemological mission. I am seriously wrong, you may reply. After all, the description of aesthetic judging in terms of 'cognition in general' is a genuine phenomenological approach, though perhaps less clear on certain points than one might expect it to be. Yes. But one of these points is exactly how it happens – as opposed to being stipulated by the theory itself – that the mind remains in the mode of a non-conceptual, non-objectifying reflection, instead of proceeding, as usual, from intuitions to concepts. The satisfaction in the beautiful

has a causality in itself, namely that of *maintaining* the state of the representation of the mind and the occupation of the cognitive powers without a further aim. We *linger* over the contemplation [*Betrachtung*] of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself [...].
(5: 222, translation amended)

This is the almost completely missing moment: an isolated observation in the doctrine of taste (although there is a similar one in the First Introduction, 20: 230-31). Yet at the same time this is the only adequate description of why and how the reflection on some intuitive content does not result in determinate cognition. And I have guess why the observation remains isolated. Try to combine it with Kant's claim that the aesthetic relation of the 'cognitive powers' is (or, again, represents) the condition of determinate cognition. The result is an absurdity: We linger over the condition of determinate cognition because it maintains, strengthens, and reproduces itself. A condition is something like threshold. It must be possible to move on from it to that which depends on it, and the latter must occur, provided the condition is there, unless some other factor (but not a theoretical stipulation) prevents it from occurring. By contrast, a self-maintaining pleasure is purposive in and for itself.

Kant conspicuously does not say anything essential about the phenomenon of play in his doctrine of taste. He calls the relation of the imagination and the understanding a play, but fails to present it as play.¹⁵ Again, I have a guess why. The same guess, actually. A play proper, be it either physical or mental, is that autotelic activity that maintains itself. Aesthetic reflection as condition *and* play at the same time: that does not work. Kant should choose: *either* condition *or* play. In the doctrine of taste,

¹⁵ See Alexander Wachter's excellent analysis of the insufficiency of the notion of play in the doctrine of taste, Wachter, 2006, pp. 88-120.

he opts for condition. But only a credible account of play could explain why we linger over the contemplation of the beautiful; for play itself is this lingering. And a credible account would have to stress that a play will not maintain itself, indeed, will not even begin unless there is a tension that sets and keeps it in motion. A complete equilibrium is no play.

In §49, which already belongs to the doctrine of art – and which I tend to regard as one of the most important texts in and for the history of aesthetics –, Kant returns to topic of the self-maintaining character of aesthetic reception. And this time he explicitly connects it to play:

Spirit, in an aesthetic significance, means the animating principle in the mind. That, however, by which this principle animates the soul, the material which it uses for this purpose, is that which purposively sets the mental powers into motion, i.e., into a play that is self-maintaining and even strengthens the powers to that end. (5: 313)

As if Kant wanted to make up for something he failed to do. As quoted above, the doctrine of taste holds that '[t]he *beautiful* [...] requires the representation of a certain *quality* of the object, which also can be made intelligible and brought to concepts (although in the aesthetic judgment it is not brought to concepts)'. Compare with this the sentence that immediately follows in §49:

Now I maintain that this principle is nothing other than the faculty for

the presentation of *aesthetic ideas*; by an aesthetic idea, however, I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., *concept*, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible. (5: 314)

I have a long list of questions I would like to ask Kant should we once meet; after all, he might be right with the first postulate of practical reason, although I am not sure whether immortal souls feel like conversing about such worldly things as taste and art. One of the questions concerns the relation of these two sentences. Until Kant clues me up, I cannot but think of a deliberate correction. He first asserts then denies the possibility of conceptualization.

This is not the place to go into the details of Kant's theory of art. Let me confine myself to two points. First, the notion of aesthetic ideas is the only plausible explanation for the phenomenon of play, as it pinpoints the tension that sets and keeps play in motion. What is given in the 'representation of the imagination' challenges the understanding, invites it to play but does not let itself be fully conceptualized. It never becomes an object of cognition, strictly speaking. It maintains play, animates the mind by providing more than can be captured by concepts.

Second, it seems to be misguided to play the doctrine of art off against that of taste (and, accordingly, to talk about a correction on Kant's part), for this presupposes that the aesthetic judging of natural beauty (to which the

doctrine of taste is basically restricted) and the reception of artworks are comparable, whereas they are not, the latter being concerned with intentionally meaningful artefacts calling for comprehension and interpretation. Yes, this surely must be kept in mind. And it is pretty easy to keep this in mind in the present case, as the doctrine of art reads almost like it was another book. Kant mostly drops the epistemological vocabulary he was so keen to use in the doctrine of taste. No 'cognition in general', no 'subjective condition of cognizing', nothing like that. Definitely refreshing. Even taste is but a supporting actor.

One of the few points of connection between the two doctrines is the first sentence of §51. 'Beauty (whether it be beauty of nature or of art) can in general be called the *expression* of aesthetic ideas' (5: 320). To be sure, Kant hastens to add, in the same sentence, that in the case of 'beautiful nature the mere reflection on a given intuition, without a concept of what the object ought to be, is sufficient for arousing and communicating the idea of which that object is considered as the expression' (5: 320). Honestly speaking, I do not know what idea a natural beauty, e.g., a 'parrot' (5: 299), expresses; unless it is the idea of the supersensible, which is a different story. I am quite sure, however, that 'mere reflection' cannot mean the same as it meant in the doctrine of taste (if it meant anything at all there). 'What makes judgments [of taste] *merely* reflective is that in them, the effort of the activity of judgment to form concepts *fails*. And it fails because it *cannot* succeed.' (Longuenesse, 1998, p. 164.) So simple it is.

Well, not so quite simple. Whereas a work of art can be said to be unconceptualizable in the sense that no interpretation exhausts its meaning, a parrot has no meaning to offer (at least no intended meaning, even when it recites a poem; or in this case the meaning is intended by its master, which makes the bird a living work of art). Yet by introducing the notion of aesthetic ideas into the explanation of natural beauty and its experience, Kant brings in the motif of tension, too. Parrots do not have the tendency to fatally challenge ornithology. But natural beauty also proves concept-resistant in that the 'quality' that makes it beautiful – and which Kant originally said to be conceptualizable – keeps it irreducibly different from objects of cognition as such, and/or (depending on what route/s an aesthetic theory chooses to follow) in that the mind finds itself reluctant, even unable to proceed from intuition to conceptual consciousness proper as a result of reflection. This mental occurrence, though markedly different from the interpretation of artworks, is still something to which the notion of play applies: a sort of back-and-forth oscillation between the way I know and the way I see, animated by the latter proving, *hic et nunc*, untranslatable into the former. 'Cognition in general'? Maybe, but in a completely uninformative sense at best. Condition of determinate knowledge? Clearly not. Kant's doctrine of art suddenly takes back the aesthetic judging of natural beauty from the transcendental theory of empirical cognition. (And opens an entirely new horizon, on which there appears, faintly, the twofold possibility that, first, things can be seen – as opposed to cognized – in a mode of being

other than that of empirical objects, and that, second, aesthetic judging is an experience of freedom in the modest yet valuable sense that its subject feels herself – as opposed to, or least as distinguished from, knowing herself to be obliged by the law of practical reason – in a mode of being other than that of a cognizing subject of objects in the world of appearances.)

A final remark. I said in the Introduction that Kant's doctrine of taste gets distorted by an epistemological interest. I have tried to show how I mean that. But I in no way meant to suggest that Kant intended to distort taste. Most of the components of his theory of taste – including common sense – had already been there long before the third *Critique* (see Kant, 2005). If I may guess again, he presumably believed they would blend in well with transcendental epistemology. Just another question to ask him over there.

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