

# THE ORIGINS OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL JUSTIFICATION OF TASTE – KANT’S SEVERAL VIEWS ON THE STATUS OF BEAUTY

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## ABSTRACT

The article follows Kant’s different views on aesthetics ranging from the pre-critical period to the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. It argues that John Zammito’s psychological explanation of why Kant in the third *Critique* developed an argument for the transcendental justification of judgements of taste is unconvincing. As an alternative, the article shows how Kant in his published pre-critical discussions of aesthetics was relying upon empiricist sources while he in private comments turned to consider the culture critique of Rousseau. Kant’s preoccupation with questions of culture critique, it is argued, was an important reason to enlarge the doctrines of transcendental philosophy with a third *Critique* containing a transcendental aesthetics of beauty. Additionally, it is pointed out an interesting similarity throughout the development of Kant’s philosophy. In 1765 and in the third *Critique* Kant was concerned to keep philosophy and judgements of taste apart from science in order to argue that these were spaces for freethinking.

## KEYWORDS

Kant, Aesthetics, Art, Culture Critique, Zammito, Freethinking.

In 1781, as Kant launched the system of transcendental philosophy in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he criticized his fellow Germans for their use of the term *aesthetics* to denote “what others call the critique of taste.”<sup>1</sup> According to Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason* and restated in the revised version of 1787 such use stemmed from “a failed hope” uttered by the “excellent analyst Baumgarten, of bringing the critical estimation of the beautiful under principles of reason, and elevating its rules to a science.” Rather, *aesthetics* should be understood in its original Greek meaning as a term designating the human ability to obtain sensory impressions. Kant proclaimed a system of transcendental philosophy in which the term aesthetics was confined to the “transcendental Aesthetics,” a transcendental aesthetics that amounted to a transcendental demonstration of the pure forms of intuition, space and time. Hence, introducing the system of transcendental philosophy Kant denied all attempts

to connect aesthetics as judgements of taste with any principles of reason. He rejected Baumgarten's endeavour as "futile" and stressed how the "putative rules or criteria [of taste] ... are merely empirical as far as their sources are concerned, and can therefore never serve as *determinate* laws a priori according to which our judgement of taste must be directed, rather the latter constitutes the genuine touchstone of the correctness of the former."<sup>2</sup> Transcendental aesthetics understood as the pure forms of intuition, space and time, Kant argued, made up an important element of the field of science and was exempted from any connection to judgements of taste. As merely empirical the judgements of taste stood outside the realm of principles of reason.

In his pre-critical philosophy Kant also thought of judgements of taste as empirical. In the 1760's he deemed all judgements of beauty to be based upon feeling and therefore thoroughly empirical. Kant furthermore supposed judgements of taste to be analogous to moral judgements. Both were based upon feelings and thus of empirical nature. In the small book *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* from 1764 Kant explored the associative interconnections between feelings of beauty and the sublime with moral feelings. The book was one of his most popular pre-critical books republished twice in 1766 and 1771. Kant's point of departure was an anthropological and empirical generalization of the human being which led him to discuss feelings of beauty and the sublime as not only analogous to moral feelings but also to the nature of the human sexes. Accordingly, the feeling of beauty was generally related to the female sex and the moral feeling of helpfulness, that is "the inclination to kindness."<sup>3</sup> The feeling of the sublime, on the other hand, was most often associated with the male sex and the feeling of true virtue based upon principles. These principles, Kant went on to explain, "are not speculative rules, but rather the consciousness of a feeling that lives in all human breasts ... the feeling of the beauty and dignity of the human nature."<sup>4</sup> Though the sublime and the feeling of virtue were related to a kind of principle this should not be understood as if they were based upon independent principles of reason. Rather, all judgements of taste and morals were reducible to natural feelings.

In the first *Critique* Kant completely reversed any such positive assessment of the empirical nature of judgements of taste and morals. Transcendental moral philosophy should be grounded on a principle of reason and, as we have seen, Kant scorned the attempt to develop a philosophical aesthetics for its empirical basis. However, this was not his final conclusion. As Kant nine years

later, in 1790, published the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* it contained a complete revision of his view on judgements of taste. Kant only retained one element from his rather rejecting view in the first *Critique*, namely that there can be no science concerned with aesthetic judgements of taste. Nevertheless, Kant claimed the pure judgement of taste included a principle a priori. As such they should be considered part of the transcendental system of philosophy – that is a part of the principles of reason. The special variety of the principles a priori in judgements of taste Kant called a “*subjective universal validity*, that is the aesthetic, which is not based upon any concept.”<sup>5</sup>

Judgements of beauty escaped the empirical realm albeit in the paradoxical form of having subjective universal validity. Accordingly, Kant believed the third *Critique* to be a completion of the system of transcendental philosophy without any increase of the doctrinal conceptions of philosophy as a science. The third *Critique* does not establish a further doctrine of philosophy apart from theoretical and practical philosophy. The pure judgements of taste form a genuine part of the philosophical system of principles a priori because they point to the functioning of *reflective judgement* as an expression of reason.

The paradoxical nature of the judgements of taste calls for further explication. Just as puzzling are the several times Kant changed his mind about the nature of judgements of taste. Part of the answer, of course, lingers on the great shift in his philosophical outlook before and after the silent ten years dividing the pre-critical writings of Kant in the 1750's and 1760's from the system of transcendental philosophy inaugurated by the first *Critique* in 1781. But this does not explain why Kant in the third *Critique* argued for a transcendental foundation of judgements of taste after having discarded judgements of taste as merely empirical in the first *Critique*. In the following a closer examination of Kant's opinions about beauty and the sublime in the pre-critical period is laid out in order to assess the philosophical achievement of Kant in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.

#### THE ELEGANT MAGISTER OF THE 1760'S

In the 1760's Kant was known in Königsberg for his distinguished style in manners as well as clothing. Friends and students approvingly called him the elegant magister (der galante Magister) because of his stylishness. Just as important for his reputation was the fact that Kant introduced the intellectual circles of Königsberg to the new philosophical trends from Britain and France. Kant was

described as a man of elegance who impressed the social life of Königsberg with his intelligence, wit and tasteful habits. Concerned with his outer appearance he was said to have developed the maxim that it “was better to be a stylish jester than a jester with no sense of style.”<sup>6</sup> As a man in his late thirties and early forties he would wear extravagant clothes such as jackets with gold embroidery and a ceremonial epee.

This extravagance was only possible because Kant was an esteemed as well as hard working private lecturer (Privatdozent). It was usual that a private lecturer at the university would be teaching between 16 and 24 hours each week.<sup>7</sup> Earning his living from the fees paid by the students attending his lectures, Kant – as all private lecturers – would advertise for his teaching hoping his reputation combined with the exciting content of the courses could attract many paying students to his classes. Kant’s teaching advertisement for the winter semester 1765 has survived to our times. Here we can read that Kant keenly underlined that he was not teaching “philosophy” but trying to convey to the students how to “philosophise.”<sup>8</sup>

Kant thought it possible to learn a science such as history or mathematics but not philosophy exactly because it did not have the format of a scientific discipline – what Kant later would call being a doctrine of science. Kant explained that a science can be learned because students can impress upon their “memory or understanding everything which can be introduced as a complete discipline for us. In order to learn philosophy such a discipline should be ready at hand. It should be possible to point out a book and say: see here is wisdom and reliable insight ... Until someone can show me such a book of wisdom that I can depend upon ... I must be allowed to declare that it amounts to an exploitation of the communality [of the teaching of the universities] if he [the teacher of philosophy] instead of broadening the ability of the entrusted youth to use their understanding ... would run after them with a supposed ready world wisdom. ... It is the method to think about things yourself and to judge for yourself that the student seeks [in philosophy] and which alone can be useful for him.”

Kant’s statement is remarkable in itself. For our topic, it is even more interesting because, as will be argued in the concluding part of this paper, Kant’s understanding in 1765 of the method to learn to philosophise can be seen as analogous to what Kant finds is the transcendental achievement of the aesthetic judgements in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. We can detect a kind of congruence between Kant’s pre-critical understanding of the aims of teaching within the field of philosophy and his transcendental

justification of aesthetic judgements in 1790. But in the 1760's Kant's view on aesthetics was quite different as becomes evident from Kant's pre-critical discussions of aesthetics.

#### KANT'S EARLY AESTHETIC OBSERVATIONS

According to Kant the *Observations on the Feeling of Beauty and of the Sublime* was not so much a contribution to philosophy as an accumulation of observations on the feelings of beauty and the sublime. Commencing the text Kant noted, "the impressions of pleasure or annoyance are not as much dependent upon the character of external things that rouse these feelings, as upon the feeling in each individual human being, a feeling that stirs pleasure or displeasure."<sup>9</sup> This implied that "what for some gives rise to great delight is experienced as nauseating by others." Aesthetic judgements, Kant thought, were relative to the individual and exempt from universality even though it is possible to *observe* general trends. Kant's aim was to look closer at some of the more remarkable trends of beauty and the sublime and as such he underlined that the observations were conducted "more with the eye of the observer than the eye of the philosopher."

It is worthwhile to ponder on the title: *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*. As explained in the very first line of the book Kant thinks of beauty and the sublime as feelings stemming from the individual constitution of each human being. What the individual feels is beautiful is beautiful for her and there is no room for a discussion of the correctness of the individual feeling. Furthermore, Kant plays with associations to other contemporary philosophical works within the field of aesthetics. Already in 1724, Francis Hutcheson had published a work entitled *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. The book was translated into German in 1762. In 1757 Edmund Burke's highly famous essay *A philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* was published. Even though it was not translated into German until 1773 by Lessing, its content was available for the German reading public as early as 1758. That year Moses Mendelssohn published a thorough reception of Burke's book in the journal *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* and his own aesthetic writings show discernable influence from Burke. So even though Kant was no fluent reader of English he was familiar with Hutcheson's and Burke's works. Kant's title most strikingly alludes to these two well-known British philosophical essays.

According to Hutcheson the beautiful object contains objective qualities, which the individual is exposed to. Thus, if there is disagreement about beauty it mainly has to do with just *how* beautiful a thing is, not with whether or not it *is* beautiful at all.<sup>10</sup> In order to argue for the objective quality of all beautiful objects Hutcheson assumes that beauty is perceived by “an internal sense [which] is a passive power of receiving ideas of beauty from all objects in which there is uniformity amidst variety.”<sup>11</sup> Burke does not follow Hutcheson in his perfectionist comprehension of the objective qualities of beauty nor the assumption of a specific sense to perceive beauty. Rather, he argues that judgements of taste are developed and improved “by extending our knowledge, by a steady attention to our object, and by a frequent exercise.”<sup>12</sup> According to Burke judgements of beauty advance through experience of beautiful objects and are based upon empirical sense experience.

Hutcheson and Burke both define feelings as ideas exempted from inner impressions and thus identify beauty, the sublime and virtue with ideas. In 1764 Kant can be said to follow this understanding of aesthetic feelings. He proposes that the subjective feeling aroused by impressions of pleasure or annoyance makes up the foundation of aesthetic feelings. In particular, Kant’s *Observations* display close resemblance to Burke’s philosophical aesthetics. In accordance with Burke Kant suggests that all judgements of taste are subjective and relative to the individual feeling aroused by inner impressions.

Even more obviously Kant echoes Burke’s explanation of the sublime as a negative experience of the great, which is turned into a feeling of pleasure by the subject. According to Kant the feelings of beauty and the sublime both cause pleasant but very different emotions. Kant explicates the difference by pointing out that “the sublime *stirs* and the beautiful *allures*.”<sup>13</sup> This difference Kant, also in accordance with Burke,<sup>14</sup> observes to derive from the objects: “The sublime must always be great, the beautiful can also be small. The sublime must be simple, the beautiful can be polished and delicate.”<sup>15</sup> The *Observations* are so closely indebted to Burke’s theory of aesthetics that Kant’s criticism of Burke in the third *Critique* amounts to an indirect criticism of Kant’s own previous understanding of aesthetics. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* Kant calls Burke’s aesthetics “a mere empirical exposition of the sublime and of beauty.”<sup>16</sup> According to Kant’s mature judgement Burke should be admired for his psychological precision in the descriptions. But if the analysis remains on the empirical surface it can only be of use for empirical anthropology.

This would imply that Kant in the first *Critique* was right to expel aesthetics as a philosophy about judgements of taste from the principles of reason. Kant concludes the assessment of Burke by pointing out:

“If, however, we place the satisfaction in the object altogether in the fact that it gratifies us by stirring or alluring, we must not assume that any *other* man agrees with the aesthetic judgement which *we* pass; for as to these each one rightly consults his own individual sensibility. But in that case all censorship of taste would disappear, except indeed the example afforded by the accidental agreement of others in their judgements were regarded as *commanding* our assent.”<sup>17</sup>

Without explicitly mentioning his own pre-critical undertakings within the field of aesthetics Kant clearly dissociates himself from his former view. A very palpable result of Kant's determined distance from his own efforts in philosophy before 1781 is the fact that he did not possess any of his pre-critical publications.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it is a lucky coincidence that Kant's personal exemplar of the *Observations on the Feeling of Beauty and of the Sublime* has been preserved. In the years following the publication Kant used it as a place to draft new ideas and thoughts on blank pages copied into the book.<sup>19</sup> Though the comments are not a break with the text they underline the important influence Kant got from his readings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 1760's. In the private comments Kant exclaims that “Rousseau has put me straight.”<sup>20</sup> He further states that reading Rousseau's philosophy taught him to value the dignity and rights of humanity regardless of the social and educational status of the individual. Before being put straight by reading Rousseau, Kant thought only research “could do honour to humanity and I despised the mass who knows nothing.”

In the 1760's Kant connected taste with sociability and beauty while virtue belonged to the solemn thinker stirred by the sublime.<sup>21</sup> In the published text as well as in his private comments Kant clearly attached greater importance to the sublime. In 1790 as Kant reassumed the discussion of aesthetics in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* he thoroughly reworked the analysis of aesthetics as well as the importance of beauty. The question is why he changed his mind about aesthetics? Why did Kant, who as late as in the *Critique of Pure Reason* rejected that judgements of taste could be anything more than subjective feelings write a third *Critique* claiming that aesthetic judgements of beauty and the sublime involve a

specific way of cognising ourselves and our world so that they also make up a part of the transcendental examination of the capacities of the mind?

#### THE REVOLUTION IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF AESTHETICS

One possible answer maintains Kant was rethinking his conception of aesthetics in order to counter the developments within contemporary German art and intellectual thought. According to such a view the enormous influence of the writers of *Sturm und Drang* in German literature gave way to a new emotionality, which Kant perceived to be a threat to his transcendental philosophy. This is argued by John Zammito:

“The contextual origins of the *Critique of Judgement* lie in the problematic concern of Immanuel Kant to drive the forces of the *Sturm und Drang* from their prominence in German intellectual life in the 1780s and to establish the complete hegemony of the *Aufklärung*, the mantle of whose leadership had fallen to him with the deaths of Gotthold Lessing (1780) and then Moses Mendelssohn (1786). ... As its leader, Kant felt compelled to rebuff the ‘excesses’ of the rival *Sturm und Drang* movement. ... the *Sturm und Drang* paraded its claims to privileged insight as the inspiration of ‘genius.’ This Kant could abide neither personally nor philosophically.”<sup>22</sup>

According to Zammito Kant understood himself as taking part in a battle between rivalling intellectual schools and as such wanted to dam up for the emotionality flooding the public in novels such as Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* from 1774.<sup>23</sup> The psychological basis of the argument lives off a portrait of Kant as prompted to reconsider his views on aesthetics by his “hostility to the *Sturm und Drang*.”<sup>24</sup> As we have seen, Kant expelled aesthetics as judgements of taste from transcendental philosophy in the first *Critique*. However, Zammito argues that the battle between the schools caused Kant to include such aesthetics in his transcendental philosophy. Zammito does not take into account that Kant continuously from 1764 until 1790 had equalled judgements of taste with subjective empirical feelings that could not be given any grounding in the principles of reason. On Zammito’s account the main reason for Kant to include aesthetics in his third *Critique* rests on Kant’s wish to rescue his fellow citizens from being stirred by the emotionality of the *Sturm und Drang*. His means to aid the public would be his transcendental analysis of the beautiful which



could prove that these emotions – if they were nothing but stirring and alluring – were simply expression of the agreeable and not an experience of beauty and therefore only empirical generalizations.

From my point of view, it seems highly improbable that Kant should be able to dam up the emotionality of the *Sturm und Drang* by way of his complex and intricate discussion of the subjective universal validity of pure judgements of taste. It is possible to argue that Kant's preoccupation with expelling *Rührung* and *Reiz* – that is emotional *stirring* and *alluring* – from the judgement of taste was a way to counter the emotionality of the *Sturm und Drang*. Nevertheless, to judge Kant's differentiation between the feeling of pleasure in judgements of beauty from the agreeable aroused by emotions to be founded in a hostility towards *Sturm und Drang* seems a strange and implausible psychological explanation. I would therefore opt for another account.

In his handwritten comments to the *Observations* Kant, as already pointed out, frequently mentioned Rousseau as a major source of influence. He took interest in Rousseau as a moral and political philosopher. Besides setting Kant straight with regard to esteeming the rights of humanity in all human beings, Kant also praised Rousseau for having discovered the “deeply hidden nature of [the plurality of human shapes] and the hidden law according to which providence would be justified.”<sup>25</sup> As early as the mid 1760's Kant believed Rousseau had revealed how the developing human culture was a source of human misery<sup>26</sup> all the while he also had proven that humanity could escape its self-imposed misery. Rousseau did not think that the advancements of society had made human beings happy or independent but rather dependent and miserable. But the unjust society could be made just if established upon a social contract between all. It seems that Kant as early as the 1760's believed Rousseau's arguments for a social contract to found the just society and the pedagogical ideas in *Emile* had torn off the cultural masks of human nature and shown humanity itself to be both the course of the sufferings in society and the key to the solution. From Rousseau Kant learned culture critique as is evident in the comments to the *Observations*. An illuminating example hereof is Kant's claim:

“In a society that functions according to fashion I should solely view everybody else as egoistic and thus I should not praise anybody present or absent – rather in order for my conversation to become interesting I should either joke or mock.”<sup>27</sup>

In the *Observations* Kant had taken in the British part of the discussion of aesthetics whereas the French Rousseauian part of the discussion is relegated to the private comments. With a sensualistic theory of aesthetics, it was impossible to say anything qualified about the moral problems of the aestheticisation of society. If Kant wanted to confront the problems raised by Rousseau a new and transcendental take on aesthetic judgements was needed. This was exactly what Kant did in the third *Critique*. By means of the differentiation between the pure judgement of natural beauty and the judgements of art, Kant could point out how we humans at one and the same time can be the cause of insincere assessments of each other as modish or dreary and contain the resources to judge and act morally. The transcendental justification of the judgements of taste enabled Kant to argue that it is possible for humanity to steer between the self-imposed aesthetic norms which often – but not always – make virtuosi in judging the beauty of art “vain, capricious, and addicted to injurious passions”<sup>28</sup> while “on the other hand, ... to take an immediate interest in the beauty of nature (not merely to have taste in estimating it) is always a mark of a good soul; and that, where this interest is habitual, it is at least indicative of a temper of mind favourable to the moral feeling that it should readily associate itself with the contemplation of nature.”<sup>29</sup>

On this account Kant changed his opinion on the question of aesthetic judgements in order to disentangle and develop further the intricate bonds between taste and his critical conception of morality. In the third *Critique* Kant isolated a pure judgement of taste in order to set the genuine judgements of taste apart from empirical and social developed tastes. Kant developed a theory of judgement of taste in which it is possible to differentiate between empirical and transcendental judgements. According to Kant’s mature view the empirical development of taste can be reduced to the shimmer of fashion and contains little relevance for transcendental reasoning. The empirical judgements of taste aptly supply resentment in culture. The transcendental judgement of taste, conversely, is a medium of communication expanding, developing and preparing the reflective practice of judgement. Importantly the pure judgement of taste is a singular judgement on grounds of the sensation of the object. Thus, aesthetic judgements can never be general. It is the singular experience of the object, which constitutes the condition of possibility for any aesthetic judgements. We need to experience nature and artworks in order judge aesthetically.

## THE PURE JUDGEMENT OF TASTE AND FREE BEAUTY

According to Kant the *pure* judgements of taste concern *free* beauty. But often our judgements relate to dependent beauty that simply stirs or allures us. The difference between the aesthetic judgements relating to social esteem and the pure aesthetic judgements concerned with the reflective power of judgement and the feeling of intellectual pleasure is also associated to the object of the aesthetic judgement. Free beauty does not presuppose any concept whereas dependent beauty is deemed beautiful conditional to the perfection of the object and thus conditional to the concept of perfection of the object. For example a rose is beautiful regardless of its organic perfection as a flower that enables the plant to set seeds and thus reproduce itself. But a chandelier is beautiful dependent upon its perfection and grace *as a chandelier*. The differentiation concerns the way the mind is affected by the aesthetic object.

Kant defines *free* beauty with the Latin concept “*Pulchritudo vaga*.”<sup>30</sup> It is a remarkable translation of *free beauty* since *vaga* is not the translation of ‘free’. A straight Latin translation of the adjective *free* would be ‘*liber*’. ‘*Vaga*’ means undecided or wandering. Kant deliberately defines *free beauty* in Latin as an undecided or wandering beauty. Through the Latin translation, *pulchritudo vaga*, Kant induces the alert reader to ask herself what good reasons there could be to point out that a key feature of free beauty is its undecidedness or wandering character. As follows he hints at an important aspect of free beauty.

In defining free beauty, Kant is not referring to the properties of the object but rather to how the human mind responds to the object. The mind commences to wander as the imagination is undecided with regard to what concept can capture the experience of beauty in the object. This is not the case with dependent beauty – we can explain why a chandelier is an especially beautiful chandelier with reference to the definition of chandeliers. The beauty of a rose is not dependent upon it being a rose or even a flower. It is free from all conceptual definition of its “floweriness.” As a result, the mind wanders. It does not accept the proposed concepts of the understanding as adequate encapsulations of the aesthetic experience. The experience of free beauty expands the capacities of the mind whereas the experience of dependent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*) lingers on the allurements of emotions in the subject. In the experience of free beauty, the imagination and the understanding are animated in the free play, which Kant considers to be correlated to the transcendental feeling of pleasure.

## ART AND BEAUTY

Objects of art are, Kant emphasises, objects produced with a purpose by a human being. As such art can either be mechanical or aesthetic.<sup>31</sup> All art created for the purpose of realising the cognition of how to produce the thing is mechanical. The chandelier is mechanical art because the silversmith formed the silver with the purpose of creating a chandelier. The silversmith had as her purpose to realise the thought idea of a thing, which can function as a container supporting burning candles. Aesthetic, on the other hand, is all art, which has the feeling of pleasure as its immediate purpose. This implies that it is not possible to point out what was the exact purpose of the creative process. There can be many ways to accomplish the purpose of arousing a feeling of pleasure and art can either be agreeable or beautiful. The agreeable art stimulates the observer's feelings of sensational pleasure. In beautiful art, the representations of the object convey feelings of cognitive pleasure in the observer. The feeling of pleasure originates from the free play between the imagination and the understanding produced in the observer contemplating the artwork.

By way of this definition of aesthetic art Kant indicates a double character. Either art can be a medium staging human fashion and social stratification or it can be a vehicle for expansion of the communication and intellectual comprehension of art itself and its purpose. Clearly Kant thinks art can be beautiful in a similar manner as the free natural beauty if it is aesthetically beautiful. At the same time, he underlines that not all aesthetic art functions analogously with natural beauty. If it is aesthetically agreeable art it is not comparable to natural beauty. It is evident with regard to beauty in art, just as is the case with natural beauty, that the attitude of the observer and the quality of the object make up the deciding aspects as we judge some artwork or object of nature to be beautiful. The important difference between the object of nature and of art is that we cannot point to a purposeful creator of nature but must always expect a purposeful creator of art. This gives nature its simplicity and art its complex social meaning.

The aesthetic ideas make up the aesthetic medium in which the production of beautiful artworks can take place.<sup>32</sup> This implies that the subject having an aesthetic experience of a beautiful artwork is aware of the object as art and thus aware of the purposeful creation of the object. But the judgements of taste cannot exhaust the object. Kant explains that "by an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e.,

concept, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible.”<sup>33</sup> There is no definite interpretation ready at hand. Artworks without a powerful aesthetic idea can be exhausted as their aesthetic value is created by allurements (Reiz) and thus depends upon being agreeable. Artworks with strong aesthetic ideas overflow with a manifold of images and concepts so that no expression can be found which would encompass the whole of the experience of the work. The free play of the mind strives to find adequate descriptions. Whenever a concept is proposed in communication about the artwork it only opens up for even more unthought of and un-named concepts and parts of the work. In the judgement of beautiful art, we request others to see and experience the same as us. Thereby our conversation about the artwork is a conversation, which expands our concepts by way of the wandering imagination – it wanders not only in the sensational experience or the conceptual knowledge but also in our personal life experience and our hopes and fears of the future.

#### THE ABILITY TO THINK FOR ONESELF

To explain how beautiful artworks can be created Kant points out two aspects. The artist should have *genius* and *taste*. Genius is a gift of nature. It enables the artist to expand her imagination to develop ever new aesthetic ideas. This spirit rousing the imagination of the genius as an “animating principle of the mind”<sup>34</sup> must be kept in check within the artist by her taste. Taste amounts to the reflective judgement of the creations of genius. While the genius freely creates aesthetic ideas that overflow with meaning the artist’s taste keeps these ideas within limits. Kant clearly gives prominence to taste over genius. Whereas genius can create an art which may be “said to be *full of spirit*”<sup>35</sup> it is on account of taste art “deserves to be called *beautiful art*.” If the genius is not kept in “conformity of the law of the understanding” the “abundance and originality of Ideas” of the genius “produces in lawless freedom nothing but nonsense.” Thus, according to Kant the beautiful artwork is not only a *distraction* for the wandering mind. The free flow of ideas is limited by the taste of the artist. The judgement of taste “brings clearness and order into the multitude of thoughts, it makes the [aesthetic] ideas susceptible of being permanently and, at the same time, universally assented to, and capable of being followed by others, and of an ever-progressive culture.”

The observer of art should meet an artwork with traits that will be universally assented to if the artwork is to be judged *beautiful*. If art is merely or primarily a distraction its main service will be to satisfy the subject's relentless craving after ever new distractions in order to expel the ensuing discontentment of the unstirred mind.<sup>36</sup> The aesthetic stance towards life can therefore – as Kant had learned from Rousseau – be a distraction from living a morally justified life in accordance to valid values. But if art and the judgements of taste are related to the higher purpose of “an ever-progressive culture,” Kant believes art can be a gateway to important discussions about fundamental values and perspective on our common living. The transcendental judgement of taste points to the enhancement of our common communication about how to lead our lives. Therefore, a standard of beautiful art is that it should be “brought into more or less close combination with moral Ideas...”<sup>37</sup> Important for art as beautiful and not merely “*full of spirit*” is the discussion of moral ideas. Since art can only hint at moral ideas and does not contain a specific and definite definition of these the judgements of taste uttered in relation to a beautiful artwork do not settle any moral question but open perspectives of what kind of beings we are and what our cultural aims are.

A significant result of Kant's discussions of art in comparison to natural beauty is that the appreciation of natural beauty can shape the individual mind to a more profound susceptibility to moral judgements whereas there is no straight forward tie to a moral personality through the admiration of artificial artworks. We may attribute to the lover of natural beauty “a beautiful soul, to which no connoisseur or lover [of art] can lay claim on account of the interest he takes in his [artistic] objects.”<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, exactly the artificiality of artworks and the complexity and ambiguity of the social world which we humans have created ourselves are addressed in the beautiful artworks. The discussions of art can give rise to a social space for thinking and judging about the direction of our culture. The representations of a beautiful artwork are aesthetical ideas regarding the shared culture and therefore open up a conversation about our shared conditions of living and our hopes for the development of our common culture.

The space in which we apply judgement of taste to beautiful art has central traits in common with Kant's pre-critical description of teaching philosophy. In 1765, Kant highlighted the want of a well-established discipline of scientific philosophy and the consequence, namely that it is not possible to teach philosophy as a science with a clear body of scientific results for the students to

memorise. The primary aim of the teacher of philosophy should therefore be to teach students “to philosophise.”<sup>39</sup> Students should be taught how “to think about things yourself and to judge for yourself.” As Kant in 1790 introduced the aesthetic judgements of beauty into the system of transcendental philosophy he believed transcendental philosophy to be a true doctrine of philosophy. In Kant’s mature view *transcendental philosophy can be taught as the science of philosophy*. However, within this science the aesthetic judgements turn up as part of the system without the characteristics of a science. The reflective judgements of beauty have a “*subjective universal validity*”<sup>40</sup> which is akin to Kant’s understanding in 1765 of philosophy.

To learn to philosophise – according to Kant in 1765 – amounted to learning to think and judge for one self. In the third *Critique* Kant designates this ability to the judgements of taste. Underlying the pure judgements of taste is the faculty of the *sensus communis*. It includes “a faculty of judgement, which in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought; in order *as it were* to compare its judgement with the collective reason of humanity, and thus to escape the illusion arising from the private conditions that could so easily be taken for objective.”<sup>41</sup> The important common trait between Kant understanding in 1765 and in 1790 is the underscoring of the importance of human free thinking. In the maxims of the *sensus communis* Kant underlines this as he states that the human understanding is based on the maxims “1. to think for oneself” and “3. always to think consistently.” The second maxim, “2. to put ourselves in thought in the place of every one else” points to a social limitation to the free thinking and is an advancement compared to Kant’s understanding of how to philosophise in 1765. In the third *Critique* Kant emphasises how the free thinking of each of us needs to be directed to the equal free thinking of any other in order to develop harmonically.

Thus, in the third *Critique* Kant took Rousseau’s proclamation of culture critique seriously. With the possibility of pure judgements of taste concerning nature as well as beautiful art Kant argued that within the human species is enclosed the conditions of possibility for developing a culture which is morally justified. But it is up to each individual to differentiate between the consumption of art and beautiful nature as a means to improve social status and the engagement in communication of the experience of beauty as a world-opening discourse.

- 1 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Berlin: Königliche Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900ff), B 35 – all references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are given to the pagination of the B-edition of the work, that is the second edition which Kant published in 1787. This edition contains Kant's improvements of the first edition from 1781. Pagination from both the A-edition from 1781 and the B-edition are usually given as reference in all editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* regardless translation and publishing house. All other references to Kant's works are given with reference to the *Akademie Ausgabe* of Kant's collected works by mention of the Title of the work, the volume within the edition and page number. For example: *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, AA 2: 210. All quotes are my translations of the German original.
- 2 Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 36.
- 3 Immanuel Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (Berlin: Königliche Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900ff), AA 2: 215.
- 4 Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, AA 2: 216.
- 5 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Berlin: Königliche Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900ff), AA 5: 215.
- 6 See Manfred Kühn, *Kant. Eine Biographie*, transl. Martin Pfeiffer (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007), 141. Kant also frequently visited the theatre with his friends. See Kühn, *Kant. Eine Biographie*, 199.
- 7 See Kühn, *Kant. Eine Biographie*, 132.
- 8 This and the following quotes are found in Immanuel Kant, *Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbjahre von 1765-1766* (Berlin: Königliche Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900ff), AA 2: 307.
- 9 This and the following quotes are found in Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, AA 2: 207.
- 10 Hutcheson can be said to reformulate the quite complicated aesthetic thinking of Shaftesbury in the conceptual language of English empiricism. Shaftesbury, himself a neo-platonist, argued for an aesthetic sensibility which expose the connection between truth and nature. For a concise exposition of Hutcheson's aesthetics see John McHugh, "Introduction" in Francis Hutcheson, *Hutcheson's Selected Philosophical Writings* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2014), 8-10.
- 11 Hutcheson, Francis, "The Sense of Beauty" [1724] in *Hutcheson's Selected Philosophical Writings*, 53.
- 12 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* [1757] (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), 25.
- 13 Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, AA 2: 209. In the German original Kant writes "das Erhabene rührt, das Schöne reizt."
- 14 Burke writes about the comparison between the sublime and the beautiful that "there appears a remarkable contrast. For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great [sublime] rugged and negligent." Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 113.
- 15 Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, AA 2: 210.
- 16 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, AA 5: 277.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 278.
- 18 See Arthur Warda, *Immanuel Kant's Bibliothek* (Berlin: M. Breslauer Verlag, 1922), 10.
- 19 For more information see Marie Rischmüller, "Einleitung" in Kant, *Bemerkungen in den 'Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen'* (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1991).
- 20 This and the following quote from Kant, *Bemerkungen in den 'Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen,'* 38. Kant reiterated this exact point as he wrote: "To hold opinions of inequality causes inequality between people. Only the teachings of monsieur Rousseau can bring about that also the most learned of philosophers takes his knowledge sincerely without help from religion and still does not think himself better than the ordinary man." *Ibid.*, 130.
- 21 See *ibid.*, 43.
- 22 John Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 8.
- 23 See *ibid.*, 36.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 25 Kant, *Bemerkungen in den 'Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen,'* 48.
- 26 Rousseau inserts the origin of discord in the most intimate relations between humans, romantic love: "with love arose jealousy; discord triumphed, and human blood was sacrificed to the gentlest of all passions." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, transl. Cole, G.D.H. (Vermont: Everyman Library, 1993), 89-90.
- 27 Kant, *Bemerkungen in den 'Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen,'* 107
- 28 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, AA 8: 298.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 299.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 229.
- 31 See *ibid.*, 304-306.
- 32 See *ibid.*, 313-316.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 313.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 317.
- 35 This and the following quotes in *ibid.*, 319-320.
- 36 See *ibid.*, 325-326.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 326.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 300.
- 39 This and the following quote from Kant, *Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbjahre von 1765-1766*, AA 2: 307.
- 40 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, AA 5: 215.
- 41 This and the following quotes in *ibid.*, 294.