



## Judgments of Taste Immanuel Kant

### CRITIQUE OF JUDGEMENT

#### Second Book Analytic of the Sublime

#### § 31. Of the Method of Deduction of Judgements of Taste

A Deduction, *i.e.* the guarantee of the legitimacy of a class of judgements, is only obligatory if the judgement lays claim to necessity. This it does, if it demands even subjective universality or the agreement of every one, although it is not a judgement of cognition but only one of pleasure or pain in a given object; *i.e.* it assumes a subjective purposiveness thoroughly valid for every one, which must not be based on any concept of the thing, because the judgement is one of taste.

We have before us in the latter case no cognitive judgement—neither a theoretical one based on the concept of a *Nature* in general formed by the Understanding, nor a (pure) practical one based on the Idea of *Freedom*, as given *a priori* by Reason. Therefore we have to justify *a priori* the validity neither of a judgement which represents what a thing is, nor of one which prescribes that I ought to do something in order to produce it. We have merely to prove for the Judgement generally the *universal validity* of a singular judgement that expresses the subjective purposiveness of an empirical [153] representation of the form of an object; in order to explain how it is possible that a thing can please in the mere act of judging it (without sensation or concept), and how the satisfaction of one man can be proclaimed as a rule for every other; just as the act of judging of an object for the sake of a *cognition* in general has universal rules.

If now this universal validity is not to be based on any collecting of the suffrages of others, or on any questioning of them as to the kind of sensations they have, but is to rest, as it were, on an autonomy of the judging subject in respect of the feeling of pleasure (in the given representation), *i.e.* on his own taste, and yet is not to be derived from concepts; then a judgement like this—such as the judgement of taste is, in fact—has a twofold logical peculiarity. *First*, there is its *a priori* universal validity, which is not a logical universality in accordance with concepts, but the universality of a singular judgement. *Secondly*, it has a necessity (which must always rest on *a priori* grounds), which however does not depend on any *a priori* grounds of proof, through the representation of which the assent that every one concedes to the judgement of taste could be exacted.

The solution of these logical peculiarities, wherein a judgement of taste is different from all cognitive judgements—if we at the outset abstract from all content, *viz.* from the feeling of pleasure, and merely compare the aesthetical form with the form of objective judgements as logic prescribes it—is sufficient by itself for the deduction of this singular faculty. We shall then represent and elucidate by examples these characteristic properties of taste.

### § 32. First Peculiarity of the Judgement of Taste

The judgement of taste determines its object in respect of satisfaction (in its beauty) with an accompanying claim for the assent of *every one*, just as if it were objective.

To say that “this flower is beautiful” is the same as to assert its proper claim to satisfy every one. By the pleasantness of its smell it has no such claim. A smell which one man enjoys gives another a headache. Now what are we to presume from this except that beauty is to be regarded as a property of the flower itself, which does not accommodate itself to any diversity of persons or of their sensitive organs, but to which these must accommodate themselves if they are to pass any judgement upon it? And yet this is not so. For a judgement of taste consists in calling a thing beautiful just because of that characteristic in respect of which it accommodates itself to our mode of apprehension.

Moreover, it is required of every judgement which is to prove the taste of the subject, that the subject shall judge by himself, without needing to grope about empirically among the judgements of others, and acquaint himself previously as to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the same object; thus his judgement should be pronounced *a priori*, and not be a mere imitation because the thing actually gives universal pleasure. One would think, however, that an *a priori* judgement must contain a concept of the Object, for the cognition of which it contains the principle; but the judgement of taste is not based upon concepts at all, and is in general not a cognitive but an aesthetical judgement.

Thus a young poet does not permit himself to be dissuaded from his conviction that his poem is beautiful, by the judgement of the public or of his friends; and if he gives ear to them he does so, not because he now judges differently, but because, although (in regard to him) the whole public has false taste, in his desire for applause he finds reason for accommodating himself to the common error (even against his judgement). It is only at a later time, when his Judgement has been sharpened by exercise, that he voluntarily departs from his former judgements; just as he proceeds with those of his judgements which rest upon Reason. Taste [merely]1 claims autonomy. To make the judgements of others the determining grounds of his own would be heteronomy.

That we, and rightly, recommend the works of the ancients as models and call their authors classical, thus forming among writers a kind of noble class who give laws to the people by their example, seems to indicate *a posteriori* sources of taste, and to contradict the autonomy of taste in every subject. But we might just as well say that the old mathematicians,—who are regarded up to the present day as supplying models not easily to be dispensed with for the supreme profundity and elegance of their synthetical methods,—prove that our Reason is only imitative, and that we have not the faculty of producing from it in combination with intuition rigid proofs by means of the construction of concepts. There is no use of our powers, however free, no use of Reason itself (which must create all its judgements *a priori* from common sources) which would not give rise to faulty attempts, if every subject had always to begin anew from the rude basis of his natural state, and if others had not preceded him with their attempts. Not that these make mere imitators of those who come after them, but rather by their procedure they put others on the track of seeking in themselves principles and so of pursuing their own course, often a better one. Even in religion—where certainly every one has to derive the rule of his conduct from himself, because he remains responsible for it and cannot shift the blame of his transgressions upon others, whether his teachers or his predecessors—there is never as much accomplished by means of universal precepts, either obtained from priests or philosophers or got from oneself, as by means of an example of virtue or holiness which, exhibited in history, does not dispense with the autonomy of virtue based on the proper and original Idea of morality (*a priori*), or change it into a mechanical imitation. *Following*, involving something precedent,

not “imitation,” is the right expression for all influence that the products of an exemplary author may have upon others. And this only means that we draw from the same sources as our predecessor did, and learn from him only the way to avail ourselves of them. But of all faculties and talents Taste, because its judgement is not determinable by concepts and precepts, is just that one which most needs examples of what has in the progress of culture received the longest approval; that it may not become again uncivilised and return to the crudeness of its first essays.

### § 33. Second Peculiarity of the Judgement of Taste

The judgement of taste is not determinable by grounds of proof, just as if it were merely *subjective*.

If a man, *in the first place*, does not find a building, a prospect, or a poem beautiful, a hundred voices all highly praising it will not force his inmost agreement. He may indeed feign that it pleases him in order that he may not be regarded as devoid of taste; he may even begin to doubt whether he has formed his taste on a knowledge of a sufficient number of objects of a certain kind (just as one, who believes that he recognises in the distance as a forest, something which all others regard as a town, doubts the judgement of his own sight). But he clearly sees that the agreement of others gives no valid proof of the judgement about beauty. Others might perhaps see and observe for him; and what many have seen in one way, although he believes that he has seen it differently, might serve him as an adequate ground of proof of a theoretical and consequently logical judgement. But that a thing has pleased others could never serve as the basis of an aesthetical judgement. A judgement of others which is unfavourable to ours may indeed rightly make us scrutinise our own with care, but it can never convince us of its incorrectness. There is therefore no empirical *ground of proof* which would force a judgement of taste upon any one.

Still less, *in the second place*, can an *a priori* proof determine according to definite rules a judgement about beauty. If a man reads me a poem of his or brings me to a play, which does not after all suit my taste, he may bring forward in proof of the beauty of his poem *Batteux* or *Lessing* or still more ancient and famous critics of taste, and all the rules laid down by them; certain passages which displease me may agree very well with rules of beauty (as they have been put forth by these writers and are universally recognised): but I stop my ears, I will listen to no arguments and no reasoning; and I will rather assume that these rules of the critics are false, or at least that they do not apply to the case in question, than admit that my judgement should be determined by grounds of proof *a priori*. For it is to be a judgement of Taste and not of Understanding or Reason.

It seems that this is one of the chief reasons why this aesthetical faculty of judgement has been given the name of Taste. For though a man enumerate to me all the ingredients of a dish, and remark that each is separately pleasant to me and further extol with justice the wholesomeness of this particular food—yet am I deaf to all these reasons; I try the dish with *my* tongue and my palate, and thereafter (and not according to universal principles) do I pass my judgement.

In fact the judgement of Taste always takes the form of a singular judgement about an Object. The Understanding can form a universal judgement by comparing the Object in point of the satisfaction it affords with the judgement of others upon it: *e.g.* “all tulips are beautiful.” But then this is not a judgement of taste but a logical judgement, which takes the relation of an Object to taste as the predicate of things of a certain species. That judgement, however, in which I find an individual given tulip beautiful, *i.e.* in which I find my satisfaction in it to be universally valid, is alone a judgement of taste. Its peculiarity consists in the fact that, although it has merely subjective validity, it claims the assent of *all* subjects, exactly as it would do if it

were an objective judgement resting on grounds of knowledge, that could be established by a proof.

### **§ 34. There is no Objective Principle of Taste Possible**

By a principle of taste I mean a principle under the condition of which we could subsume the concept of an object and thus infer by means of a syllogism that the object is beautiful. But that is absolutely impossible. For I must feel the pleasure immediately in the representation of the object, and of that I can be persuaded by no grounds of proof whatever. Although, as *Hume* says, all critics can reason more plausibly than cooks, yet the same fate awaits them. They cannot expect the determining ground of their judgement [to be derived] from the force of the proofs, but only from the reflection of the subject upon its own proper state (of pleasure or pain), all precepts and rules being rejected.

But although critics can and ought to pursue their reasonings so that our judgements of taste may be corrected and extended, it is not with a view to set forth the determining ground of this kind of aesthetical judgements in a universally applicable formula, which is impossible; but rather to investigate the cognitive faculties and their exercise in these judgements, and to explain by examples the reciprocal subjective purposiveness, the form of which, as has been shown above, in a given representation, constitutes the beauty of the object. Therefore the Critique of Taste is only subjective as regards the representation through which an Object is given to us; viz. it is the art or science of reducing to rules the reciprocal relation between the Understanding and the Imagination in the given representation (without reference to any preceding sensation or concept). That is, it is the art or science of reducing to rules their accordance or discordance, and of determining them with regard to their conditions. it is an *art*, if it only shows this by examples; it is a *science* if it derives the possibility of such judgements from the nature of these faculties, as cognitive faculties in general. We have here, in Transcendental Criticism, only to do with the latter. It should develop and justify the subjective principle of taste, as an *a priori* principle of the Judgement. This Critique, as an art, merely seeks to apply, in the judging of objects, the physiological (here psychological), and therefore empirical rules, according to which taste actually proceeds (without taking any account of their possibility); and it criticises the products of beautiful art just as, regarded as a science, it criticises the faculty by which they are judged.

### **§ 35. The principle of Taste is the Subjective Principle of Judgement in General**

The judgement of taste is distinguished from a logical judgement in this, that the latter subsumes a representation under the concept of the Object, while the former does not subsume it under any concept; because otherwise the necessary universal agreement [in these judgements] would be capable of being enforced by proofs. Nevertheless it is like the latter in this, that it claims universality and necessity, though not according to concepts of the Object, and consequently a merely subjective necessity. Now, because the concepts in a judgement constitute its content (what belongs to the cognition of the Object), but the judgement of taste is not determinable by concepts, it is based only on the subjective formal condition of a judgement in general. The subjective condition of all judgements is the faculty of Judgement itself. This when used with reference to a representation by which an object is given, requires the accordance of two representative powers: viz. Imagination (for the intuition and comprehension of the manifold) and Understanding (for the concept as a representation of the unity of this comprehension). Now because no concept of the Object lies here at the basis of the judgement, it can only consist in

the subsumption of the Imagination itself (in the case of a representation by which an object is given) under the conditions that the Understanding requires to pass from intuition to concepts. That is, because the freedom of the Imagination consists in the fact that it schematises without any concept, the judgement of taste must rest on a mere sensation of the reciprocal activity of [162] the Imagination in its *freedom* and the Understanding with its *conformity to law*. It must therefore rest on a feeling, which makes us judge the object by the purposiveness of the representation (by which an object is given) in respect of the furtherance of the cognitive faculty in its free play. Taste, then, as subjective Judgement, contains a principle of subsumption, not of intuitions under concepts, but of the *faculty* of intuitions or presentations (*i.e.* the Imagination) under the *faculty* of the concepts (*i.e.* the Understanding); so far as the former *in its freedom* harmonises with the latter *in its conformity to law*.

In order to discover this ground of legitimacy by a Deduction of the judgements of taste we can only take as a clue the formal peculiarities of this kind of judgements, and consequently can only consider their logical form.

### § 36. Of the Problem of a Deduction of Judgements of Taste

The concept of an Object in general can immediately be combined with the perception of an object, containing its empirical predicates, so as to form a cognitive judgement; and it is thus that a judgement of experience is produced.<sup>1</sup> At the basis of this lie *a priori* concepts of the synthetical unity of the manifold of intuition, by which the manifold is thought as the determination of an Object. These concepts (the Categories) require a Deduction, which is given in the Critique of pure Reason; and by it we can get the solution of the problem, how are synthetical *a priori* cognitive judgements possible? This problem concerns then the *a priori* principles of the pure Understanding and its theoretical judgements.

But with a perception there can also be combined a feeling of pleasure (or pain) and a satisfaction, that accompanies the representation of the Object and serves instead of its predicate; thus there can result an aesthetical non-cognitive judgement. At the basis of such a judgement—if it is not a mere judgement of sensation but a formal judgement of reflection, which imputes the same satisfaction necessarily to every one,—must lie some *a priori* principle; which may be merely subjective (if an objective one should prove impossible for judgements of this kind), but also as such may need a Deduction, that we may thereby comprehend how an aesthetical judgement can lay claim to necessity. On this is founded the problem with which we are now occupied, how are judgements of taste possible? This problem then has to do with the *a priori* principles of the pure faculty of Judgement in *aesthetical* judgements; *i.e.* judgements in which it has not (as in theoretical ones) merely to subsume under objective concepts of Understanding, and in which it is subject to a law, but in which it is, itself, subjectively, both object and law.

This problem then may be thus represented: how is a judgement possible, in which merely from *our own* feeling of pleasure in an object, independently of its concept, we judge that this pleasure attaches to the representation of the same Object *in every other subject*, and that *a priori* without waiting for the accordance of others?

It is easy to see that judgements of taste are synthetical, because they go beyond the concept and even beyond the intuition of the Object, and add to that intuition as predicate something that is not a cognition, *viz.* a feeling of pleasure (or pain). Although the predicate (of the *personal* pleasure bound up with the representation) is empirical, nevertheless, as concerns the required assent of *every one* the judgements are *a priori*, or desire to be regarded as such; and this is already involved in the expressions of this claim. Thus this problem of the Critique of



Judgement belongs to the general problem of transcendental philosophy, how are synthetical *a priori* judgements possible?

### § 37. What is Properly Asserted A Priori of an Object in a Judgement of Taste

That the representation of an object is immediately bound up with pleasure can only be internally perceived, and if we did not wish to indicate anything more than this it would give a merely empirical judgement. For I cannot combine a definite feeling (of pleasure or pain) with any representation except where there is at bottom an *a priori* principle in the Reason determining the Will. In that case the pleasure (in the moral feeling) is the consequence of the principle, but cannot be compared with the pleasure in taste, because it requires a definite concept of a law; and the latter pleasure, on the contrary, must be bound up with the mere act of judging, prior to all concepts. Hence also all judgements of taste are singular judgements, because they do not combine their predicate of satisfaction with a concept, but with a given individual empirical representation.

And so it is not the pleasure, but the *universal validity of this pleasure*, perceived as mentally bound up with the mere judgement upon an object, which is represented *a priori* in a judgement of taste as a universal rule for the Judgement and valid for every one. It is an empirical judgement [to say] that I perceive and judge an object with pleasure. But it is an *a priori* judgement [to say] that I find it beautiful, *i.e.* I attribute this satisfaction necessarily to every one.

### § 38. Deduction of Judgements of Taste

If it be admitted that in a pure judgement of taste the satisfaction in the object is combined with the mere act of judging its form, it is nothing else than its subjective purposiveness for the Judgement which we feel to be mentally combined with the representation of the object. The Judgement, as regards the formal rules of its action, apart from all matter (whether sensation or concept), can only be directed to the subjective conditions of its employment in general (it is applied neither to a particular mode of sense nor to a particular concept of the Understanding); and consequently to that subjective [element] which we can presuppose in all men (as requisite for possible cognition in general). Thus the agreement of a representation with these conditions of the Judgement must be capable of being assumed as valid *a priori* for every one. *I.e.* we may rightly impute to every one the pleasure or the subjective purposiveness of the representation for the relation between the cognitive faculties in the act of judging a sensible object in general.

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Immanuel Kant. Critique of Judgment. Book 2, sect. 31-38. Trans. James Creed Meridith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911.

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