

SYNTHESIS IN KANT'S AESTHETICAL IDEA

The purpose of this paper is to highlight an aspect of Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory treated in the *Critique of Judgement*, and to present this aspect in such a way that will lead towards work that shows an anticipation of later currents in western philosophy. The aspect I wish to highlight is depicted within the tension of his discussion between the requirement of the judgement of the beautiful to possess a subjective universality, and the requirement that the product of Genius, beautiful art, be exemplary. This aspect of his theory will first be shown within the frameworks of personal and cultural development, and then will be brought into much sharper focus within the technicalities of discussion in Kant's notion of an aesthetical idea. The significance of this notion will then be sketched to illuminate its importance in current work on language and meaning, and a unity with that work and Hegel's presentation of spirit.

For Kant, the judgement of something as beautiful comes about through a passive reflection on the object which is submitted to the cognitive faculties for mere estimation. Without determination by any concept, but in mere play, the cognitive faculties estimate the form of the object, and then come into an accord that produces the pleasure known as beauty. The object is therefore termed «beautiful». This reflection is subjective for Kant because a concept does not determine the course of reflection; the object is presented for a passive estimation and not a conceptual determination. The reflection can be universal for Kant because we seem to be able to communicate this act of reflection, its feeling, and conceptual determination as well. Because we do communicate, Kant infers that there must exist a common ground of this ability.

«But if cognitions are to admit of communicability, so must also the state of mind, i.e. the accordance of the cognitive powers with a cognition generally and that proportion of them which is suitable for a representation (by which an object is given to us) in order that a cognition may be made out of it admit of universal communicability¹».

1. Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Judgement*, New York, Hafner, 1972, p. 75.



Because we all possess this 'common sense', the judgement of an object as beautiful can be demanded of everyone. For Kant as well, the beautiful object is exemplary; it is that towards which we strive as a culture. Genius, as the productive faculty of the beautiful, communicates this feeling for Kant in the following manner.

«The ideas of the artist excite like ideas in his pupils if nature has endowed them with a like proportion of their mental powers²».

Something must be communicated here, some intellectual transformation must be undergone by the receiver of the beautiful. And while Genius is bestowed upon the artist as a gift of nature, attaining this exemplary level of production does not seem to occur by accident, as Kant shows.

«That for beautiful art in its entire completeness much science is requisite, e.g. a knowledge of ancient languages, a learned familiarity with classical authors, history, a knowledge of antiquities, etc. And hence these historical sciences, because they form the necessary preparation and basis for beautiful art³».

What the text implies here is that there must be some commonality between learning advanced by conceptual means and the experience of the beautiful. Otherwise, the historical sciences Kant mentions would not be the 'necessary preparation and basis' for beautiful art. This implication carries with it that the experience of the beautiful produces a development along the lines of a learning, or of at least a pre-learning. Kant further enforces this view that Genius is not a mere stumbling upon, but an effort; a labor, and at the same time, a transformative ordering, a development.

«Taste, like the judgement in general, is the discipline (or training) of Genius; it clips its wings, it makes it cultured and polished; but at the same time, universally assented to, and capable of being followed by others, and of an ever progressive culture⁴».

Genius for Kant is a production through freedom, but the freedom unleashed does have a direction. The problem I find is this. How can the *exemplary*, that towards which we strive as a culture to attain, be *universally* communicable, and demanded of as being so. The terms exemplary and universal seem to exclude each other by their very meaning.

2. KANT, p. 152.

3. KANT, p. 114.

4. KANT, p. 163.

The exemplary *work* of art, the exceeding activity needed to attain a level of beautiful production, seems to exclude an appreciation for those not developed or attuned to a like degree of the artist. For an uneducated, untrained person to grasp the beauty in the incredible complexity of a work by a Mozart or a Van Gogh, seems highly unlikely. Although the language of particular parts of the text demands universal assent and an opposing exemplariness, other language in the text shows a more appropriate, although not statically determinate, conception of the situation.

To say that there is a *possibility*, of universal communicability rather a necessity of it, would not exclude the judgement of an object as beautiful from being extended to the average or underdeveloped mind. I would suggest that Kant's criterion for universality in the agreement of the judgement of the beautiful is not to be taken as an aesthetical unambiguity to be immediately demanded of, but that the purposive ordering experienced when contemplating the object occurs for different people according to their particular level of development. This development may eventually reach a culturally accepted level of exemplariness at a later date.

It seems then, if we accept this interpretation, that the opposition created in the text by the nature of the Kantian terminology and method, creates a dynamic, ascending scale of ability in the grasping powers of appreciation of the object of beauty. In this way any individual can feel purposiveness requisite with his or her point of development of mental disposition, and then the exemplary in culture need not be fettered. It can be viewed as more of a case of «exemplary for».

I think that Kant would disagree with this interpretation of his theory of productive Genius. A strict, more narrow reading demands a level of exemplariness incompatible with the grasping powers of the ordinary individual. And although the ordinary man may produce an object through toil which presents a new ordering for those near his level of development, it still may be far from exemplary for the standards of the best in a culture. It is the emphasis on the apprehending in the ordering quality of the exemplary, and not the effort aspect of the art, in the Kantian treatment of the beautiful; that in the end renders Kant's theory antagonistic towards, and hence irreconcilable with, a universal aesthetic immediacy. This ordering activity that we have examined in the cultural arena comes into much sharper focus upon examination of the powers of apprehending and producing found in Kant's elaboration of the 'aesthetical idea'.

Genius, for Kant, is a gift of nature. It is an innate mental disposition of the subject which schematizes in freedom, and can then be followed thereafter as a rule of action for production of beautiful art. It is a willful

occurrence that is not confined in its outburst, but is channeled into a direction and quality of production. The outflow is not an explosion, not a mere force that does not discriminate for appropriateness, but is a kind of taking-in that is simultaneously a giving-out, a kind of feeling-force. The gathering process, the occurrence of ordering, is on the point of an activity that exists, for Kant; for a feeling indicative of a commonality and also an individuality.

Kant focuses this roundabout view of being by juxtaposing different general statements about beauty and productive Genius, and then closes in this view by illuminating its conceptual structure, then further by illuminating its subconceptual structure. One juxtaposition is found in the structure of meaning in the statement of «beauty as production through freedom». Freedom carries with it an implication of not being constained, a type of non-confinement. However, willful production is only recognizable only according to a direction that shows a traceable pattern, a delineation of sorts, and thus a restraint. The tension between will and freedom is illustrated by Kant in the following statements.

«By right we ought only to describe as art, production through freedom, i.e. through a will that places reason as the basis of its actions⁵,

and

»In a product of beautiful art, we must become conscious that it is art and not nature; but yet the purposiveness in its form must seem to be as free from all constraint of arbitrary rules as if it were a produce of mere nature⁶.

thirdly

»Nature is beautiful because it looks like art, and art can only be called beautiful if we are conscious of it as art while yet it looks like nature⁷».

What Kant is pointing to is that the will is not always knowable by conceptual means, but can be grasped in the sense that there is a grasping inherent in feeling, and vice versa. He thus shows that production also exceeds the boundaries of a conceptual format and must be dealt with as willing that can be grasped by other means, and that the production immanent in willing, must simultaneously be a grasping. This is how he

5. KANT, p. 145.

6. KANT, p. 149.

7. KANT, p. 149.

focuses the discussion towards its apex in the working of the 'aesthetical idea'.

Kant's elaboration of the 'aesthetical idea' is one pole of a juxtaposition between animation and structure inherent in being as a knowing-feeling; in striving as a gathering. For Kant, Genius is the faculty for production of aesthetical ideas. This is accomplished via the spirit, which for Kant is the animating principle of the mind. By following the animating principle of the mind we are made aware of the power of the faculty of imagination. Through the imagination, we take the materials of experience and rework these orders, these structures, through freedom, into new orders which surpass the previous manners of recognition and production. The representations of the imagination that do this are called 'ideas'.

«Such representations of the imagination we may call ideas. Partly because they least strive after something which lies beyond the bounds of experience and so seek to approximate to a presentation of concepts of reason (intellectual ideas), thus giving to the latter the appearance of objective reality, but especially because no concept can be fully adequate to them as internal intuitions. The poet ventures to realize to sense⁸...».

The dynamism immanent to Kant's depiction brings forth a reality, that shows to the knower a reality not previously possible. It makes real, according to rules of sense. It brings sense out of the noumena through a productive activity the static markings of a concept, it opposes the static aspect of structure that helps make our world knowable. Through Kant's critical structure we begin to see the dynamic concept of flux as a knowing. Here we find similarities to Hegel's concept of spirit as it is presented in the workings of the «negative» in the chapter on «Perception» in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

«Supersession exhibits its true twofold meaning which we have seen in the negative: it is at once a negating and a preserving. Our nothing, as the nothing of the This, preserves its immediacy and is itself sensuous, but it is a universal immediacy. Being, however, is a universal in virtue of its having mediation or the negative within it; when it expresses this in its immediacy it is a differentiated, determinate property⁹».

In the statement «Nature is beautiful because it looks like art, and art

8. Hans Georg GODAMER, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1975) p. 87.

9. GODAMER, p. 87.



can only be called beautiful if we are conscious of it as art, while it looks like nature», we see art as a willing, an effort produced in freedom without conceptual determination. It shows purposiveness followed freely, and placed in contrast to the very same freedom in another moment that produces a work that looks like a will, an effort, is behind the production. The tension in this juxtaposition brings about the feeling of contact with the dialectical development of transcendental consciousness, in a recognition along the lines of a restriction, a limiting moment of will that allows a thing to emerge in meaning from the unordered flux, that must also afford a transcendence in order for art to be a new, or re-ordering. This effect, in combination with the striving/gathering power illuminated in the workings of the aesthetical idea at the point of this emergence (shown also in Hegel's quote above), and with the statement at p. 163 about and «ever progressive culture», all show the working of an idea very similar to Hegel's world spirit as he develops it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

This dynamic characterization being depicted in Kant's elaboration of the aesthetical idea thus makes it very difficult to see his theory of common sense along such plain lines as those found in a very strict reading of the text. I think that Hegel is depicting the same aspect of being, but from the generation of spirit described through a phenomenology. Kant depicts this similar view through the meaning created between the tension of this critical language, by what he would call an analogical method.

The presence of a type of development associated with the judgement of the beautiful indicated by the passages cited here, contradicts another more basic tenet asserted in the text. The assertion in question is that nothing is learned by the judgement of the beautiful. Although development may not proceed conceptually through the experience of the beautiful, there must be some grasping factor in the gathering process that constitutes the estimation of the object. Without this apprehending and reordering there would only be a blank stare, the object as not-beautiful does not make sense. If this were the case, the entire process of an ever progressing culture referred to in the text would not be possible. This is the objection that Godamer raises in what he calls the 'radical subjectivisation of the aesthetic', in his work *Truth and Method*.

«Is there to be no knowledge in art? Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but equally certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics precisely to provide a basis for the fact that artistic experience is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind, certainly different

from that sensory knowledge which provides science with the data from which it constructs the knowledge of nature, and certainly different from all moral rational knowledge and indeed from all conceptual knowledge, but still knowledge, i.e. the transmission of truth¹⁰»?

Although there is a contradiction in the text between a grasping cultivation inherent in the experience of beauty, and Kant's insistence that nothing is learned, I would suggest that the text tends to support a Hegelian view of spirit. Godamer rightly turns to Hegel for this resolution.

«It is necessary to take the idea of experience more than Kant did, so that the experience of the work of art can be understood as experience. For this we can appeal to Hegel's fine lectures on aesthetics. Here the truth that lies in every artistic experience is recognized and at the same time mediated with historical consciousness. Hence aesthetics becomes a history of world views, i.e. a history of truth, as it is seen in the mirror of art. It is also a fundamental recognition of the task that I formulated of justifying the knowledge of truth in the experience of art itself¹¹».

I assert that one can find this type of historical consciousness, that of an ever progressive culture, in the meaning of Kant's text. We see that my interpretation of Kant, through the references to 'development' in the text, along with its focus in the apprehending and ordering qualities illuminated by the working of the aesthetical idea, answers Godamer's objection along lines that he himself turns to rectify the 'radical subjectivisation of the Aesthetic'. I also assert that Godamer's turn to Hegel for this historical consciousness merely reinforces the appropriateness of Kant's not so apparent view. Kant presents an entire construction of a view by which something must be learned in the experience of beauty, and this does not preclude his demand that the experience of beauty be non-conceptual. We find, with Johnson¹², that there must be some preconceptual experience that is a communicable, grasping, and this is reinforced upon an examination of the intricacies of the ordering and grasping immanent in Kant's notion of the aesthetical idea. This meaning can be conveyed, as Kant shows, through the vehicle and process of symbolic presentation. The examination of symbolic presentation is needed to clarify Kant's notion of an aesthetical idea.

For Kant, analogy is the structure, the vehicle, by which the aesthetical

10. KANT, p. 157.

11. G.W.F. HEGEL, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 68.

12. Mark JOHNSON, *The Body in the Mind*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 161.



idea is conveyed. The form of reflection normally associated with one work is applied to another term and the ordering that subsequently occurs produces a pleasure indicative of an accord in the purposiveness of the form with the cognitive faculties. This applies to Kant's critical structure because the form of reflection solidified previously by a determinative statement, undergoes a modification by further statements about the subject. 'Genius is', in a previous section, is modified by a later 'Genius is', or 'Genius is not'. Either way, the original form of reflection on the term and its meaning is applied by the latter, and a construction of new meaning emerges. In this way, critical works undergo what Kant depicts in his treatment of analogy. The aesthetical idea is at the heart of where this appropriateness is communicated symbolically.

«All hypotyposis (presentation, *subjectio sub aspectum*), or sensible illustration, is twofold. It is either schematical, when to a concept comprehended by the understanding the corresponding intuition is given, or it is symbolical. In the latter case, to a concept only thinkable by reason, to which no sensible intuition can be adequate, an intuition is supplied with which accords a procedure of the judgement analogous to what it observes in schematism, i.e. merely analogous to the rule of this procedure, not to the intuition itself, consequently to the form of the reflection merely and not to its content¹³».

There is an elaboration of being and meaning treated in the text that presents a meaning that anticipates later work on metaphor and the creation of meaning in language. Paul Ricoeur is one scholar noted for work in this field. Although not to be taken as exhaustive, a quote from his book *The Rule of Metaphor*, offers us a glimpse at the seminal nature of Kant's work by showing strong similarities in a division of meaning by a language scholar, and one that can easily be found in Kant's laboration on the aesthetical idea.

«So what Jean Ladriere has termed the power of signifying in order to stress its operative and dynamic character, is the intersection of two movements. One movement aims at determining more rigorously the conceptual traits of reality, while the other aims at making referents appear. This circularity between the abstractive phase and the concretizing phase makes this power of signifying an unending exercise, a "continuing odyssey"¹⁴».

13. KANT, p. 197.

14. Paul RICOEUR, *The Rule of Metaphor*, Toronto, Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977, p. 298.

Here there is a clear correlation between meaning and the gathering together of reality referred to previously in this paper. There is a division along the lines of gathering as determinative knowing that ideas strive to realize, and the production immanent in Kant's theory. There is a strong similarity to the negation and determinativeness indicated in Hegel earlier, and there is also its realization in language that Kant properly, but not exhaustively, indicates in the text by reference to analogy.

In Kant's critical structure and language on the judgement of the beautiful and productive Genius, Kant creates a metaphor that first allows the reader to feel the tracing of this dynamic ordering as his own mind generates it, and thus conveys a much deeper, and intricate conception of meaning that a strict reading will allow.

The aesthetical idea stands at the very heart of Kant's conception of meaning as its unifying moment, as a touching of the supersensible that we can possess and share. It is a reaching, a striving, a gathering, and a feeling that reminds us of our freedom and its makeup. It is the indicator that spirit is present, and thus is the life of our thought.

«It can be only that in the subject which is nature and cannot be brought under rules of concepts, i.e. the supersensible substrate of all his faculties, and consequently that with respect to which it is the final purpose given by the intelligible of our nature to harmonize all our cognitive faculties. Thus alone is it possible that there should be a-priori at the basis of this purposiveness, for which we can prescribe not an objective principle, a principle subjective and yet of universal validity¹⁵».

The development of the text from discussion of more general forms of a progressive, cumulative consciousness, to its workings at the heart of a discussion of meaning in language, shows the aesthetical idea at the point of synthesis of these two separately treated subjects. It shows a way in which a phenomenology of consciousness needs not exclude an analysis of language and meaning. It shows how the latter provides a more intricate dynamism to the original depiction of the former. When reflecting about the subject matter and methods of Hegel's work and Ricouer's later work on metaphor, it seems as if this work intended as a more general attempt to show the point of unity of these two subjects. This then answers an unneeded objection by Godamer, but agrees with sensitive insights he has that show a more

15. KANT, p. 189.

appropriate significance of aesthetics, than a traditional reading that Kant offers.

Kant wishes to show a division along the lines of a gathering animation that feels, a life giving principle to structure, that searches for a way to make real, to schematize that which cannot be sufficiently schematized. It is the not simple gathering at the edge of our abilities that lets us know that we are alive, creative creatures.

«In the most universal signification of the work, ideas are representations referred to an object, according to a certain principle, but so that they can never become a cognition of it. They are either referred to an intuition, according to a merely subjective principle of the mutual harmony of the cognitive powers, and they are called aesthetical; or they are referred to a concept according to an objective principle, although they can never furnish a cognition of the object, and are called rational ideas. In the latter case the concept is a transcendent one, which is different from a concept of the understanding, to which an adequately corresponding experience can always be supplied and which therefore is called immanent.

»An aesthetical idea cannot become a cognition because it is an intuition (of the imagination) for which an adequate concept can never be found. A rational idea can never become a cognition because it involves a concept (of the supersensible) corresponding to which an intuition can never be given¹⁶».

The aesthetical idea is the feeling of this initial bringing forth of sense from out of the noumena. It is at the point of our development forced on by a willed apprehension. It shows us, and inclines us towards, a shared commonality. Kant wishes to show the tracings, the real indications, of being by tracing it to the point where we begin to bring sense out of the noumena. At this point Kant thinks we cannot go farther. Beyond this point by which we think and can speak about being and how this emerges in meaning, Kant thinks there is only speculation.

Rick LUCZAK
(Chicago, U.S.A.)

16. KANT, p. 187.

ΣΥΝΘΕΣΗ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΙΣΘΗΤΙΚΗ ΙΔΕΑ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΝΤ

Περίληψη

Στὸ κείμενο τῆς *Κριτικῆς Δυνάμεως* ὑπάρχει μία τάση ἀνάμεσα στὴν ἀνάγκη τῆς κρίσης γιὰ τὸ ὥραϊο νὰ ἀποκτήσει ὑποκειμενικὴ καθολικότητα καὶ τῆς ἀνάγκης τὸ προϊόν τοῦ πνεύματος, τῶν Καλῶν Τεχνῶν νὰ εἶναι ὑποδειγματικό. Αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονὸς ὁδηγεῖ σὲ μία πιὸ δυναμικὴ ἀνάγνωση τοῦ Kant, ἀπὸ ὅσο ἐπιτρέπει μία αὐστηρὴ ἐρμηνεία, καὶ προΐδεάζει ἔτσι μία ἐγγελιανὴ ἄποψη γιὰ τὸ πνεῦμα. Ἀνταποκρίνεται ἀκόμη σὲ μία ἀντίρρηση τοῦ Hans Georg Gadamer. Ἡ ἔννοια αὐτῆς τῆς τάσης εἶναι ὅ,τι ὁ Kant καλεῖ αἰσθητικὴ ἰδέα. Εἶναι γιὰ τὸν Kant τὸ σημεῖο τῆς ἐνοποίησης, ὅπου ἡ ἀντίληψη, τὸ νόημα καὶ ἡ ἔκφραση εἰσδύουν στὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἐμπειρία. Τὸ γλωσσικὸ μέσον μὲ τὸ ὁποῖον ὁ Kant κάνει αὐτὴ τὴν ἀποκάλυψη εἶναι ἡ μεταφορά. Ἐτσι παρέχει ἓνα πλαίσιο μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο οἱ μεταγενέστεροι ἐρευνητὲς στὸ πεδίο τῆς γλώσσας μποροῦν νὰ τοποθετήσουν τὴ γλώσσα στὰ πλαίσια τοῦ φιλοσοφικοῦ νοήματος.

Μετάφραση: Α. ΑΡΑΒΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ

