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KANT ON ART AND TRUTH AFTER PLATO

TOM ROCKMORE*

Kant's theory of aesthetics provides an interesting view of the perennial Western aesthetic problem of the relation of art and truth. This problem dates back in the Western tradition at least to Plato, who, on epistemological grounds, infamously banishes art from the city-state. According to Plato, art must but cannot grasp the truth, which can only be grasped by the philosopher who can literally "see" the real. On this basis, he says we should banish the artist, who is incapable of cognizing the real from the city-state. In different ways, Plato's denial that art, or, if there is a difference, at least ordinary, non-philosophical art, can successfully imitate the real runs throughout the entire aesthetic tradition.

Frederick Beiser recently raised anew the question of the relation between art and truth. Beiser attacks Kant for supposedly holding an incoherent, anti-rationalist view of aesthetic truth. Specifically, Beiser denies aesthetic judgements, holding up Gadamaer as a counterexample.[1]

According to Beiser, aesthetic judgments about the characteristics of an object must be true or false, but Kant bases his view on feeling which is subjective.

Beiser believes Kant does not support but rather attacks cognitive judgment in the third *Critique*. Beiser has in mind a cognitive approach to aesthetic judgment that, hence, can be either true or false, in his view with respect to the so-called intentional state understood as a feature or features of the object itself.[2] Aesthetic rationalism and aesthetic anti-rationalism

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1. *See* FREDERICK C. BEISER, DIOTIMA'S CHILDREN: GERMAN AESTHETIC RATIONALISM FROM LEIBNIZ TO LESSING (2009).

2. *See id.* at 5. Beiser states:

> All these tenets come together in the rationalist's thesis that aesthetic judgment is *cognitive*, i.e., that it can be true or false. The rationalist insists that the pleasure of aesthetic experience consists in some intentional state, i.e., it refers to some features of the object itself. This means that there must be some reason for an aesthetic judgment, some evidence which makes it true or false. The judgment is true or false according to whether the object has or does not have the intended features, viz., its harmony or unity in variety. The competing empiricist theory of aesthetic judgment states that aesthetic judgment is *non-cognitive*, i.e., that the pleasure involved in aesthetic judgment is not intentional but only consists in feeling or sensation. For the rationalists, the great strength of their cognitive theory is that it satisfies the principle of sufficient reason, whereas the great weakness of the empiricist theory is that it violates this principle. The rationalists complain that, on empiricist premises, no reason other

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share the view that pleasure is central to aesthetic experience. Unlike the empiricist, the rationalist further insists that pleasure is linked to cognition, or even a cognitive state.[3] Kant, on the contrary, rejects the rationalist approach to aesthetics and puts forward two arguments. First, we cannot prove that a work of art is beautiful since the ultimate test is pleasure.[4] Second, we do not judge works of art according to concepts but according to the so-called "free play" between imagination and the understanding.[5]

The central point lies not in the suggestion that aesthetic judgment must be true or false, but that Kant turns away from aesthetic cognition. Beiser seems to have in mind a rejection of the Copernican revolution as a condition of an acceptable aesthetic theory. He advocates, perhaps on grounds of metaphysical realism, that it is possible to grasp and cognitively evaluate the intrinsic characteristics of the object in itself, contending that it is as it is beyond mere appearance.

Yet, by clearly distinguishing between phenomena and noumena, Kant denies that we can know a mind-independent object initself. He, hence, departs from a view of aesthetics based on claims that are true or false about the characteristics of the object. That does not, however, entail that he rejects aesthetic rationalism, or more precisely, a claim for the link between art and truth. Hence it does not follow that Kant is guilty, as Beiser puts it, of a so-called "disastrous subjectivization of aesthetic experience."[6]

Beiser's objection goes beyond Kant to cover what the latter takes over from Baumgarten (never mentioned in the third *Critique*). It is widely known that the latter revises the meaning of the word "aesthetics," which meant "sensation," to mean "taste" or "sense of beauty." Before Baumgarten, the word had been used since the time of the ancient Greeks to mean the ability to receive stimulation from one or more of the bodily senses. In his *Metaphysics* at section 451, Baumgarten broadly defines taste as the ability to judge according to the senses, instead of according to the intellect.[7]

> than feeling could be given for an aesthetic judgment, so that one cannot justify one's preferences over those of someone else.

Id.

3. *Id.* at 7.

4. *See* IMMANUEL KANT, CRITIQUE OF THE POWER OF JUDGMENT 5:280, at 161, 5:284, at 164, 5:285, at 166 (Paul Guyer, ed., Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews trans., 2000) [hereinafter KANT, JUDGMENT] (Sections 31, 33, and 34). Page references, e.g., 5:280, are to the *Akademie* edition. The second page number, e.g., 161, refers to the corresponding page in the 2000 Guyer edition.

5. *See id.* at 5:213, at 99, 5:231, at 116 (Sections 8 and 17).

6. BEISER, *supra* note 2, at 27.

7. ALEXANDRI GOTTLIEB BAUMGARTEN, METAPHYSICA 149–60 (7th ed. 1963) (1779).

Such a judgment of taste is based on feelings of pleasure or displeasure. For Baumgarten, a science of aesthetics would be a deduction of the rules or principles of artistic or natural beauty from individual taste.

In the first *Critique*, following Baumgarten, Kant says that the Germans employ the word "aesthetics" to refer to the critique of taste.[8] Nine years later, in the third *Critique*, Kant employs the word "aesthetic" to mean the judgment of taste or the estimation of the beautiful. For Kant, an aesthetic judgment is subjective in that it relates to the observer's feeling of pleasure or displeasure and not to any qualities of the external object. In other words, Kant now abandons the *a priori* approach to subjectivity he favors in the first and second *Critiques* for an *a posteriori* approach to the aesthetic object.

According to Kant, we should distinguish between something that is agreeable, or agreeable to the subject, which depends on the observer, and is subjective, and something that is beautiful, which is presumably independent of the particular observer.

Kant expects that other people will agree with us about the object we find beautiful, as though our judgment were objective.[9] "When we call something beautiful, the pleasure that we feel is expected of everyone else in the judgment of taste as necessary, just as if it were to be regarded as a property of the object that is determined in accordance with concepts . . . ."[10] Kant appears to draw attention to a deep similarity between morality and aesthetics. Since taste is objective and not subjective, we can expect it of all observers "as if it were a duty."[11]

Beiser's obvious objection is that since observers disagree, this ideal is not met. This objection is a variation of Descartes' point that commonsense is insufficient to produce agreement; hence, we require a method to agree. I take Beiser to be demanding a method that will presumably produce agreement among aesthetic observers on objective grounds. Yet this is a deep mistake, since our views of beauty, which are

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8. *See* IMMANUEL KANT, CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON B35, at 156 (Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood eds. & trans., 1998) [hereinafter KANT, PURE REASON]. Page references, e.g., B35, are to the first (A) and second (B) editions, or both where applicable. The second page number, e.g., 156, refers to the corresponding page in the 1998 Guyer and Wood edition.

9. *See* ECKART FÖRSTER, THE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF PHILOSOPHY 126 (Brady Bowman trans., 2012).

10. IMMANUEL KANT, CRITIQUE OF THE POWER OF JUDGMENT 5:218, at 103 (Paul Guyer ed., Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews trans., 1998) (1790) [hereinafter KANT, POWER OF JUDGMENT]. Page references, e.g., 5:218, are to a volume and page in the *Akademie* edition. The second page number, e.g., 103, refers to the corresponding page in the 1998 Guyer edition.

11. *Id.* at 5:296, at 176 (citation omitted).

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not and which cannot be a universal in a Platonic sense, are not independent of but rather are dependent on social context.

This suggests two points, neither of which Kant can accept. What one takes to be beautiful is in some ineliminable sense pre-philosophic, that is, a function of who one is. Further, the possibility of objective artistic interpretation is undermined by the fact that interpretation is infinite. Since the aesthetic object cannot be exhausted, there are infinite possible interpretations.

This is exactly the point Hegel brings against Kant's view of morality. The mistake also cannot be rectified merely by taking a utilitarian approach in claiming pleasure is intrinsically linked to the interest of human beings, thereby bringing the highest good into existence.

PLATO ON ART AND TRUTH

The problem is, of course, very old. An early version of the cognitive approach to aesthetics occurs in the ancient Greek belief in the unity of the true, the good, and the beautiful, which is supposedly exemplified by the ideal state. Plato seems to be an aesthetic rationalist. He is apparently committed to the view that art must grasp the mind-independent real that cannot be known through artistic imitation. Instead, it can be directly grasped by some selected individuals on grounds of nature and nurture. In our time, Heidegger exemplifies the view that aesthetics captures the features of the object. Yet there is no reason, and Beiser provides none, why we must restrict aesthetics to claims that are true or false about mind-independent objects. The deeper problem is how to understand the relation of Kantian aesthetics and cognition.

This problem is interesting for several reasons. To begin with, it concerns the proper way to read Kant's view of aesthetics. It is an understatement to say that, after several hundred years of effort, we still do not know how to read the critical philosophy. Paradoxically, we must resort to interpretation, which is never certain and never apodictic, to grasp Kant's critical philosophy, which itself is supposedly apodictic. The difficulty is only heightened since the range of interpretation of Kant's aesthetic views is so large. Thus some readers of Kant, for instance, Schelling, believe that the third *Critique* is Kant's deepest and most profound work,[12] while others believe it is essentially muddled.

12. *See* 10 FRIEDRICH WILHELM JOSEPH SCHELLING, SÄMMTLICHE WERKE 177 (1856).

This difficulty further concerns the relation between two central figures in the Western tradition: Kant and Plato. We do not know and cannot now recover Plato's position, if indeed he had one in a recognizably modern sense. It is surprisingly not known if Kant ever read Plato, though his claim to be a deep Platonist[13] suggests an important link between his position and Plato's. It is then interesting to determine if Kant follows Plato's effort to delink art and truth by rejecting representation of the real.

Another component of this problem is the general relation between aesthetics and cognition. This relation is understood in different ways by philosophers, as well as working artists. For example, Cézanne believes there is truth in painting, whereas Picasso claims that art is a lie. Plato, who is thinking of contemporary representational art, notoriously denies the relation between art and truth. At the same time, he suggests that what we can call philosophical art, for instance the ideal city-state described in the *Republic*, is beautiful, good, and also true. Other thinkers advance widely different claims. One example is the anti-Platonic view of the medieval Christians. They believe that Christian art provides a window into divine reality. An anti-Platonic view of Marxists, held by thinkers such as Lukács, also exists. Lukács contends that social realism, and hence a particular artistic style, goes beyond the distortion because of modern industrial society's role in grasping social truth.

Kant's intervention in the debate affects our understanding of the relation of art and truth. I will be suggesting that he denies one way of understanding this relation, the kind Plato rejects, while pointing toward another kind of relation between these terms that Plato apparently does not consider. I will further be suggesting that Kant's "official" conception of knowledge in the first *Critique* follows Plato's understanding of artistic imitation in denying a link between art and truth. It is only through redescribing his "widened" view of knowledge in the third *Critique* that art takes shape as a form of knowledge, knowledge of what, in Plato's view, is mere appearance.

ON KANT'S AESTHETIC RATIONALISM

Beiser's claim that Kant favors aesthetic irrationalism is unusual since most readers of Kant consider that, as the peak of the Enlightenment, his overall position, including his aesthetic view, is almost numbingly rationalist. Kant's theory of aesthetics is formulated in a series of pre-

13. *See* KANT, PURE REASON, *supra* note 8, at A313-14/B370, at 395–96.

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critical and critical works, including *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764) and again in the third *Critique*, which is variously known as the *Critique of Judgment*, the term used here, or again more literally as the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*Urteilskraft*).

It is not easy to specify the relation between Kant's conception of aesthetics and cognition. Kant's motivation in preparing the third *Critique* is extremely complex. We may speculate that several disparate concerns motivate the composition of this treatise. First, there is the deep difficulty concerning the interrelation of pure reason, discussed in the first *Critique*, and practical reason, analyzed in the second *Critique* and in the *Groundwork*. Kant, who is a highly systematic thinker, needs to overcome the obvious disparity between these two forms of reason to realize his systematic analysis of reason in general. This difficulty is already apparent in the third antinomy that Kant evokes in the first *Critique*. In the first *Critique*, Kant solves this antinomy by indicating the spheres in which natural causality and causality through freedom legitimately function. In the third *Critique*, where Kant returns to the problem of the third antinomy, he proposes two widely known solutions to this difficulty. These solutions include, first, the subordination of theory to practice, or theoretical reason to practical reason, a strategy that points back towards Aristotle and later influences Fichte and Marx; and, second, the integration of theoretical and practical reason in aesthetic reason, or a third form of reason based on aesthetic judgment.

The unity of reason is a consistent theme in Kant. For instance, in the second *Critique*, he is clear that a critique of (pure) practical reason must show the unity of practical and theoretical reason since "there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason . . . ."[14] Further, there is Kant's possible interest in restating his earlier, pre-critical view of aesthetics, worked out in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764) in rigorously critical form. A third possible concern lies in restating and enlarging the dimensions of knowledge to include knowledge that is not *a priori* but based on experience through what amounts to a logic of the irrational.[15] Still, a fourth theme is the relation between

14. IMMANUEL KANT, GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS 4:391, at 5 (Mary Gregor trans., 1997).

15. *See generally* ALFRED BAEUMLER, DAS IRRATIONALITÄTSPROBLEM IN DER ÄESTHETIK UND LOGIK DES 18. JAHRHUNDERTS BIS ZUR *KRITIK DER URTEILSKRAFT* (1975). Baeumler understands "irrationality" as the essential lack of logical transparency. "Man nennt diese klare Einsicht in das aller logischen Durchsichtigkeit entzogene Wesen der Individualität Irrationalismus." *Id.* at 4. In neo-Kantianism, irrationality points to the limit to which the object can be known. The problem is raised earlier, for instance in Fichte's 1804 version of the Wissenschaftslehre in the so-called *projection per*

aesthetics and teleology. This is the experience of beauty and the experience of nature as two sides of aesthetic judgment.

KANT ON ART AND TRUTH

The relation between art and truth in Kantian aesthetics has attracted increasing attention recently. D.W. Gotshalk, for instance, contends that Kant changed his mind in writing the third *Critique*, since he inconsistently holds a formalist theory of natural beauty but an expressionist theory of fine art.[16] Béatrice Longuenesse, presently one of Kant's most ardent defenders, indicates that Kant's theory is valuable in indicating the possibility for all aesthetic subjects to constitute a single community of subjects in going beyond their historical and cultural limitations.[17] This "Hegelian" reading of Kant suggests that Kant's aesthetic view cannot be constitutive and is at most regulative. Rudolph Makkreel makes a case that reflective judgment is "orientational" in enabling the apprehending subject to put things in context while

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hiatum irrationalem. *See* J.G. FICHTE, *Fifteenth Lecture: FRIDAY, MAY 11, 1804*, *in* THE SCIENCE OF KNOWING: J.G. FICHTE'S 1804 LECTURES ON THE WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE 115, 120 (Walter E. Wright trans., 2005). This problem dates back at least until Plato, who argues that individual things, or appearances, cannot be known. In Lukács's initial Marxism, the same notion refers to the inability of a form of philosophy to provide knowledge. Lukács holds that classical German philosophy is intrinsically irrational, whereas Marxism is rational. *See* GEORG LUKACS, HEIDELBERGER ÄSTHETIK (1916-1918), *reprinted in* 17 GEORG LUKACS, WERKE 16 (1974). In German:

> Diese notwendige Geltungsfremdheit des Materials, seine funktionelle "Irrationalität," wie Lask sagt, brauchte das Material mit Erlebnishaftigkeit, mit "Leben" in eine enge Beziehung zu bringen, deren Wesen hier in ihren Hauptzügen geklärt werden muß, um durch die verschiedenen systematischen Möglichkeiten des Erlebens hindurch zu seiner ästhetischen . . . Setzung zu gelangen.

Id. (citation omitted). For more recent discussion, see Marco Sgarbi, LA LOGICA DELL'IRRAZIONALE. STUDIO SUL SIGNIFICATO E SUI PROBLEMI DELLA KRITIK DER URTEILSKRAFT (Mimesis 2010).

16. *See* D.W. Gotshalk, *Form and Expression in Kant's Aesthetics*, 7 BRIT. J. AESTHETICS 250, 260 (1967). Gotshalk states:

> But the view we have set forth has been only that Kant holds a *formalist* theory of Natural Beauty and an *expressionist* theory of Fine Art. I believe also that these theories can be taken in their own terms within their own fields, and that each theory within its field will be found to make important contributions to the understanding of Natural Beauty and Fine Art.
>
> Our concern in this essay has been with a different question from the overall class character and intrinsic merit of Kant's aesthetical theories. To a purely disinterested observer there is considerable difference between a formalist and an expressionist aesthetical theory, and in Kant's third *Critique* there is clearly a change from the first type to the second when we proceed after some delay (over the Sublime) from his theory of Natural Beauty to his theory of Fine Art.

Id.

17. *See* Béatrice Longuenesse, *Kant's Leading Thread in the Analytic of the Beautiful*, *in* AESTHETICS AND COGNITION IN KANT'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY 194, 194–219 (Rebecca Kukla ed., 2006).

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discerning one's own place in the world.[18] In that case, aesthetic interpretation yields knowledge, though not in Kant's strict sense of the term. Others are more critical. Kant's view of aesthetic pleasure as merely self-referential has been attacked by Rachel Zuckert as "empty"[19] and failing to account for aesthetic experience. Still others go beyond Kant in reformulating a Kantian aesthetic, which supposedly yields a relation between art and truth or, on the contrary, in rejecting the project.[20] Hans-Georg Gadamer desires to "absorb aesthetics into hermeneutics."[21] He accepts a version of Kant's claim that art cannot yield conceptual knowledge, but complains, from a Heideggerian perspective, that Kant does not acknowledge the sense in which through interpretation things show themselves to us,[22] precisely the perspective Beiser appears to favor.

At stake is what knowledge, if any, aesthetics has at its disposal. I take Plato to suggest that there is true representation, or again true imitation based on intuitive knowledge of the forms, and false representation as in non-philosophical imitative art. Kant, who is still often understood as a cognitive representationalist,[23] unlike Plato denies intellectual intuition of the real, hence denies knowledge of things in themselves, and further denies representation in turning, through the Copernican revolution, to cognitive constructivism. Kant formulates a theory of aesthetics that does not yield knowledge as Plato apparently understands it in supposedly intuitively grasping the forms, nor knowledge as Kant understands in the first *Critique* in bringing sensation under the categories. Though the theory of aesthetics does not yield knowledge as earlier understood, it arguably yields another kind of knowledge based on mere interpretation.

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18. *See* Rudolf Makkreel, *Reflection, Reflective Judgment, and Aesthetic Exemplarity*, *in* AESTHETICS AND COGNITION IN KANT'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY, *supra* note 17, at 223, 223–44.

19. "[T]hough they are textually grounded, they render Kant's account unsatisfactory as a description of aesthetic experience: [they hold, in effect, that] aesthetic judgment and pleasure are purely self-referential (about themselves/each other/their own universal communicability) and thus peculiarly empty. It is difficult to see why we should believe that this *is* what we're experiencing, claiming, or feeling in aesthetic experience." RACHEL ZUCKERT, KANT ON BEAUTY AND BIOLOGY: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE *CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT* 189 n.14 (2007).

20. *See generally* PAUL CROWTHER, THE KANTIAN AESTHETIC: FROM KNOWLEDGE TO THE AVANT-GARDE (2010).

21. *See* HANS-GEORG GADAMER, TRUTH AND METHOD 146 (Garrett Barden & John Cumming eds. & trans., 1975) (translation revised).

22. *See* HANS-GEORG GADAMER, THE RELEVANCE OF THE BEAUTIFUL AND OTHER ESSAYS (Robert Bernasconi ed., Nicholas Walker trans., 1986).

23. For recent discussion of Kant's view of representation see BÉATRICE LONGUENESSE, KANT AND THE CAPACITY TO JUDGE: SENSIBILITY AND DISCURSIVITY IN THE TRANSCENDENTAL ANALYTIC OF THE *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON* 18–26 (Charles T. Wolfe trans., 1998).

Kant refers to interpretation, or hermeneutics, in passing in the first *Critique*. He famously proposes that, since he thought that the critical philosophy was misinterpreted by its initial readers, texts should be interpreted not with respect to isolated passages but rather with respect to the idea of the whole.[24] His holistic approach to hermeneutics in the first *Critique* suggests texts can be definitively interpreted in correctly grasping the supposedly single correct interpretation. Kant similarly signals that interpretation is a kind of knowledge in the third *Critique* by suggesting that a judgment of taste is valid for all observers.

This very interesting hermeneutical suggestion points to an enlarged, more inclusive, but still problematic understanding of cognition in the third *Critique*. In place of the earlier view that knowledge in the full sense of the term is necessarily *a priori* only, Kant now substitutes a view of knowledge that includes both *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements. The realm of knowledge henceforth includes the logic of the rational *a priori* as well as, in effect, a logic of the "irrational," or a logic of the *a posteriori* that was formerly excluded but is now included in the analysis of taste. It further follows that judgment, which only emerges as an independent faculty in the third *Critique*, becomes central in Kant's revised view of experience and knowledge. This points to the later Kantian view, which is incompatible with the first *Critique*, but compatible with the third *Critique*, that judgment, which alone determines good and bad usage of the understanding, lies deeper than the understanding.[25] In other words, this appears to extend Kant's theory of interpretation[26] beyond the problem of the correct reading of his position or of any other philosophical position. This widening of the original view of knowledge advanced in the first *Critique* has been underway for some time. The distinction in the *Prolegomena* between sensation, perception, and experience suggests there is a kind of knowledge prior to and larger than bringing perceptions under scientific laws by converting them to experience. Kant now brings this concern to fruition through formulating a theory of aesthetics based on a subjective, non-categorial approach to experience. Theoretical knowledge is based on the understanding, but aesthetic taste is based on judgment. Kant, who was concerned to base theory in practice, emphasizes

24. *See* KANT, PURE REASON, *supra* note 8, at Bxliv, at 123.

25. *See* IMMANUEL KANT, GESAMMELTE SCHRIFTEN 25:175 (*Akademie* ed., 1962) ("Die Urteilskraft hat den grössten Wert. Der schlechte und gute Gebrauch des 9Verstandes beruht auf den Urteilskraft.").

26. *See* RUDOLF MAKKREEL, IMAGINATION AND INTERPRETATION IN KANT: THE HERMENEUTICAL IMPORT OF THE *CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT* 1 (1995).

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this point in claiming that judgment is more important because it is practical.[27]

The difficulty in Kantian aesthetics does not lie in widening knowledge to include interpretation but rather in his overly optimistic view of interpretation. Kant, who acknowledges the need for interpretation, apparently understands it on the unyielding model, akin to the Platonic forms, in which there is neither change, nor development nor history in yielding a result that is always correct and never at any point incorrect. But interpretation occurs in a historical sequence according to standards formed in a social context in which different observers engage in an ongoing struggle about how to understand a text, an art object, and so on. In apparently either denying or again in failing to detect the intrinsically historical character of interpretation, Kant remains consistent with his view of knowledge as unchanging while overlooking the interpretive dimension in cognitive claims.

KANTIAN HERMENEUTICS AND THE LIMITS OF AESTHETIC KNOWLEDGE

In the third *Critique* Kant applies the conception of interpretation he briefly but brilliantly evokes toward the end of the B preface of the first *Critique* to the problem of aesthetics. At stake is the kind of cognitive claim, if any, that emerges from a hermeneutical approach to the beautiful.

This problem is later raised against Heidegger by his most prominent student, Gadamer. Gadamer's point is that Heidegger unsuccessfully tries to evade the historicity of interpretation in claiming to go back behind the tradition to recover the problem of the meaning of being as it was allegedly originally and authentically raised in early Greek philosophy. In short, if interpretation is perspectival, then its result cannot be a-perspectival. It follows that a representation of the past can be constructed, but pace Proust, and despite what Heidegger says about being, the past itself can never be recovered as it was. In other words, an interpretation remains only an interpretation and the past always remains past.

Beiser praises the fact that Gadamer returns to Plato.[28] Yet since interpretation cannot substitute for dialectic, Gadamer does not and cannot reach aesthetic truth through interpretation. Interpretation does not solve

27. KANT, GESAMMELTE SCHRIFTEN, *supra* note 25, at 15:171 ("Urtheilskraft ist wichtiger, weil sie praktisch ist."); *see also id.* at 25:175.

28. *See* BEISER, *supra* note 1, at 29 ("It is the great merit of Gadamer's revival of aesthetic truth that he returns to its classical sources in Plato.").

(or resolve) Plato's objection that the artist, who merely imitates, cannot know reality.

A version of this difficulty occurs in Kant's view of interpretation. In the B preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant is concerned with understanding theories, including the critical philosophy, through textual interpretation. His strategy lies in a qualified return to the ancient religious distinction between the spirit and the letter, or again between the part and the whole. Kant thinks that in grasping the idea of the whole we avoid reaching a mistaken inference based on taking the part out of context. It never occurs to him, as the enormous Kant debate amply demonstrates, that there can be more than one idea of the whole, for example more than one suggestion of what an author intended, more than one way, say, to read Kant's work. Hegel, as already noted, famously points out that a similar problem vitiates the Kantian theory of morality. Since every concrete situation can always be approached from an infinite variety of perspectives, in practice, a single "universalizable" moral rule can never be identified.[29]

A similar difficulty arises in the aesthetic theory that Kant formulates in the third *Critique*. We can reconstruct Kant's aesthetic view briefly as follows: in determinative judgments we subsume given particulars under known universals, but in reflective judgments we seek to find unknown universals for given particulars. According to Kant, reflective judgments are subjective universal judgments, which apparently means that in practice reflective judgments are not tied to any universal concept. Hence they are subjective in designating what everyone ought to agree about even if they do not actually agree. Further, according to Kant, the aesthetic judgment of beauty relies on finality in that it appears to be designed with a purpose. The judgment that something is sublime goes beyond the limits of comprehension by actually inspiring fear.

Aesthetic judgment is subjective in several senses: it does not concern the properties of the object but rather attempts to infer something resembling authorial intent; it relies on human beings to infer from a single instance to a general rule in roughly the same way that Mill claims inference follows from a single case; and it cannot exclude different possible inferences. Beiser would like aesthetic judgments to determine a property in the aesthetic object, which, according to Kant, is possible only through a causal theory. Yet a causal theory of aesthetics does not

29. *See* G.W.F. HEGEL, PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT 252–62 (A.V. Miller trans., 1977).

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dispense the observer from the need for interpretation and hence does not eliminate the subjective dimension.

Kant's difficulty lies in admitting the subjective character of aesthetic judgment while suggesting it yields knowledge in a way different from relying on concepts. Kant, who is crystal clear that beauty cannot be determined through concepts, rather relies on a distinction between ideas and ideals, or again between a concept of reason and a representation adequate to that idea.[30] A judgment of taste ascribes universal assent, which means that everyone should agree in finding an object beautiful, but not that it is actually so, that is, not that the object in fact possesses the qualities in question.[31] The arbiter of this relation is common sense, that is, the so-called free play of the cognitive powers.[32] Yet Kant very clearly concedes that a judgment of taste that cannot be proven, nor demonstrated neither *a posteriori* nor *a priori*, hence cannot be objective.[33]

Everything depends on what it means to demonstrate. Judgments of taste, which are not objective in the sense that they can be demonstrated, are arguably objective in a different sense. The great cultural critics arguably make "objective" aesthetic judgments in at least two senses: in helping us to see what we would not otherwise see, and in suggesting interpretations of, as well as about, the value of the work. This is a form of judgment that arguably depends on discerning the difference between ideas and ideals, between artistic perfection and artistic realization, and which is exhibited, as well as measured, through critical acumen.

ON ART AND TRUTH AFTER KANT

I come now to my conclusion. I have argued two points. First, I suggested that the third *Critique* presents a revised grasp of experience. In the first *Critique* and in the *Prolegomena*, this term refers to the cognitive stage following perception in which content is brought under universal scientific laws on the assumption that all experience can be reduced to scientific experience. This view is now revised in the new view of experience in the third *Critique*, which is not conceptual but rather non-conceptual, and this view hence gives rise to interpretation in place of knowledge as it was earlier understood, and which can yield nothing more than an explanation of the world. Second, I argued that this leads to a

30. *See* KANT, POWER OF JUDGMENT, *supra* note 10, at 5:232, at 117.
31. *See id.* at 5:281–83, at 162–64.
32. *See id.* at 5:237, at 121–22.
33. *See id.* at 5:285–86, at 166–67.

different view of knowledge. Though this would not be knowledge on the view Kant defended earlier, it not only illustrates his view of the interpretation of a philosophical position as specified in the B edition of the first *Critique* but it also illustrates what remains if it turns out that science itself, hence scientific knowledge, is situated within experience in general and, despite Kant's insistence on science as *a priori*, is never able to leave interpretation behind. This points to the later Kantian view, which is apparently incompatible with the view expounded in the first *Critique* but seemingly compatible with that expounded in the third *Critique*, that judgment, which alone determines good and bad usage of the understanding, lies deeper than the understanding.[34]

The change in the conception of experience in the third *Critique* results in a change in the relation of Kant to Plato. In the third *Critique*, Kant denies the connection of art and truth in one sense in considering cognition as it is understood in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the sense in which he denies that art represents the real, hence in which he turns away from metaphysical realism, Kant is a Platonist. If that is what the relation of art and truth amounts to, then one can say that Kant does not contradict but rather sustains Plato's complaint that imitative art cannot grasp reality, though Kant does not support the related view that the artist should be barred from the city. I further argued that, in appealing to interpretation, Kant devises a non-Platonic way to relink art and truth based on interpretation, which does not require representation, and in that sense, he is not a Platonist. In pointing to the hermeneutic dimension, Kant does not redeem the relation of art and truth against Plato. Yet he usefully suggests ever so obscurely that art has a role to play as an interpretation of experience.

Kant does not develop this idea, perhaps since he is apparently unable to admit that there are levels of knowledge, hence levels of cognitive objectivity. At stake is a kind of cultural knowledge that depends on argument but not on demonstration in, say, the natural scientific sense, and that follows from Kant's distinction between ideas and ideals.

I would like to suggest that there is further another way to understand the relation between art and truth on the basis of Kant's Copernican insight. Kant, from the perspective of his normative view of knowledge in the first *Critique*, does not see the possibility of knowledge as concerns art objects, which Hegel, who takes into account Kant's Copernican

34. KANT, GESAMMELTE SCHRIFTEN, *supra* note 25, at 25:175 ("Die Urteilskraft hat den grössten Werth. Der schlechte und gute Gebrauch des Verstandes beruht auf den Urteilskraft.").

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revolution, detects with respect to subjects. The central core of the Copernican insight, that we only know what we in some sense "construct," suggests that knowledge requires an identity between subject and object, knower and known, subjectivity and objectivity. In this respect, Hegel, for instance, is not only a Kantian but he brings out, on the basis of Kant's Copernican insight and hence in exploiting a Kantian conceptual resource Kant overlooks, an interesting idea about the relation of art and truth. Hegel agrees with Kant and Plato that art cannot know the mind-independent object, but further points out that, since we "concretize" ourselves in what we do, in constructing art objects of all kinds, we gain a different kind of knowledge, knowledge about ourselves. To conclude, I would like to suggest that we find here a way to redeem Kant's conviction that "Urtheilskraft ist wichtiger, weil sie praktisch ist."[35]

35. *See id.* at 15:171. My translation: "The power of judgment has the greatest value. The good and bad use of the understanding rests on the power of judgment."