

Kant's Consideration on Aesthetic Judgement

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Abstract

Eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant, believes that the aesthetic experience is disinterested, it is disinterested because it is not judged on the basis of the utility it serves. Therefore, aesthetic pleasure has no relation with utility and use. Moreover, Kant claims that the aesthetic experience is universal, and universality is the result of disinterestedness. According to Kant, when a person judges an object as beautiful and gets pleasure from that beautiful object, his judgement is not completely subjective or personal, because that beautiful object has a universal appeal. Aesthetic experience includes purposiveness without any purpose. An object is considered as beautiful not simply because it has some purpose behind it. Judgement of beauty is the appreciation of the formal elements of an object which is considered to be beautiful.

Key Words: Disinterested pleasure, beautiful, sublime, artist, genius.

Objectives of the study

The present paper aims at understanding the concepts of Immanuel Kant related to aesthetics in the context of western philosophy and will analyse whether his theory is capable of establishing a satisfactory definition. Primary attempt will be to explore how Kant developed his view on aesthetics.

The study intends the following:

- I. To analyse Kant's view regarding subjectivity and objectivity about the concept of beauty.
- II. To find out whether there is any relation between aesthetic pleasure and utility.
- III. To find out whether there are rules or norms that provide any kind of standard in aesthetic judgements.
- IV. To find out whether an artist should be genius to produce art.

Limitation of the study

The scope of aesthetics is too vast due to its wide variety which includes areas like Literature, Music, Performing Arts etc. The aim of this present work is not to explore the history of aesthetics. Therefore, it will not attempt any chronological discussion on aesthetics. This work will limit its scope by primarily focusing on western philosophy which includes the aesthetics theory of Immanuel Kant since he imparted unique and significant view regarding aesthetics.

Methodology

The method which will be used to carry out the proposed paper which includes the critical analytic method, descriptive method, evaluative method and comparative method. To explore the whole study of aesthetics the primary and secondary sources will be consulted along with the various articles from philosophical journals as well as journals of aesthetics.

The concept of aesthetics in Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant was a critical philosopher who made a synthesis of Rationalistic philosophy and empirical philosophy. Kant wrote three books which are known as the famous critiques namely, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Critique of Practical Reason* and *The Critique of Judgement*. Among these three Critiques, the first one deals with the problem of knowledge where Kant claims that knowledge is the joint product of sense experience and a priori principles of understanding. The second critique includes the detailed examination about

practical activity of reason. The third critique which is *Critique of Judgement* deals with the problems of aesthetics that includes the explanation of the nature of beautiful as well as sublime. Tolstoy explains Immanuel Kant's conception of aesthetics and writes, according to Kant,

Man has knowledge of nature outside him and of himself in nature. In nature outside himself he seeks for truth; in himself he seeks for goodness. The first is an affair of pure reason, the other of practical reason (free-will). Besides these two means of perception, there is also the judging capacity which forms judgements without reasoning and produces pleasure without desire. This capacity is the basis of aesthetic feeling.¹

According to Kant the fundamental problem of philosophy is the problem of knowledge. A judgement is something which expresses that knowledge. In the first critique, Kant discusses about the theoretical aspect of reason and in the second critique Kant discusses about the practical aspect of reason. The third critique which is *Critique of Judgement* possesses the discussion about taste, beauty and the other connected notions. Judgement according to Kant, is the faculty of subsuming under rules, which means to differentiate whether something fall or does not fall under the rule.

Understanding, reason and judgement are the three aspects of thought. Through understanding one can arrive at something which is universal. The subsumption of the particular under the universal is possible through understanding. Reason established the particular through the universal. A priori laws are furnished by both reason and understanding. According to Kant the judgement also can furnish the apriori laws which he mentioned in his third critique. According to Kant, human mind has three main faculties called cognition, desire and faculty of pleasure and displeasure. According to Psychologists, these three faculties correspond to the three divisions of thinking, willing and feeling. Some pleasures are purely personal as they fulfil some personal desire. For example, a person may find a dish tasty which is his personal experience though the same dish may not be tasty for another person. But there is another kind of pleasure which does not need any satisfaction of desire. This type of pleasure is called disinterested pleasure. According to Kant, such kind of pleasures are judged by some a priori principles which are same for different individuals. Some objects may be so constructed or some objects may be created in such a way that they can fulfil some purpose in nature. The judgment of these gives us pleasure which is disinterested in nature.²

Four logical Moments of Judgements

In the *Critique of Judgement*, while analysing about the notion of beauty Kant mentioned about the four logical moments of judgement. These are, Quality, Quantity, Relation and modality. Under Quality the aesthetic experience is disinterested, Under Quantity aesthetic experience is universal, under Relation aesthetic experience includes purposiveness without any purpose and under Modality the aesthetic judgement is necessary.

Under Quality, aesthetic judgement is disinterested according to Kant. It is taste which judges an object in a disinterested way and determines its beauty. The judgement of beauty depends on the judgement of taste. The judgement of taste is neither cognitive nor logical but aesthetic. Taste judges an object in a disinterested way. Kant writes, "Taste is the faculty of judging an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion apart from any interest. The object of such a delight is called beautiful."³

There is no relation between beauty and good according to Kant. There is no relation between judgement of taste and utility too. The pleasure of seeing a beautiful scenery or watching some children's play has no personal benefit or use. This type of pleasure is different from the pleasure of watching a school being constructed which is for the benefit of the education of children. Similarly, sugar may be pleasant while eating, but it is not beautiful. So, Kant claims that aesthetic pleasure is disinterested and free. It is disinterested because it is not judged on the basis of the utility it serves. Therefore, aesthetic pleasure has no relation with utility and use.

Under Quantity, aesthetic experience is universal in character. Kant claims, "The beautiful is that which, apart

¹Tolstoy, Leo. *What is Art and Essays on Art*. translated by Aylmer Maude, Oxford University Press, London, 1930, pp. 97.

² Jhanji, Rekha. *Aesthetic Communication, The Indian perspective*, published by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1985, pp. 4-6.

³ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.42.

from a concept, pleases universally.”⁴ According to Kant, aesthetic pleasure is universal in nature and universality is the result of disinterestedness. Though it is universal, it is free from concepts. According to Kant when a person judges an object as beautiful and gets pleasure from that beautiful object, his judgement is not completely subjective or personal, because that beautiful object has an universal appeal. This happens because in some characteristics, human mind and sensibilities has some uniformity because of which a subjective mind may have universal agreement. According to Kant, when a man judges an object as beautiful it is because of the harmony between reason and imagination. Therefore, aesthetic pleasure is the result of the mental balance between imagination and intellect. According to Kant, in the subjective meaning, beauty is that which pleases without any practical advantage and reasoning and in the objective meaning, beauty is the form of the object suitable with its purpose which is perceived without the conception of its utility.⁵

According to the logical function Relation, aesthetic experience involves purposiveness without purpose. Kant writes, “Beauty is the form of purposiveness in an object, so far as this is perceived in it apart from the representation of an end.”⁶ When a person designs a gramophone, he has a purpose and the act of designing the gramophone is also purposive. But the notion of purposiveness is different in case of an aesthetic object. There may be art objects like gramophone which is made by the purpose of a designer. We may get pleasure from such art objects but this pleasure is different from the aesthetic pleasure. Aesthetic pleasure is such pleasure which we get through our contemplative mind. It is unknown to us whether the beautiful natural object is the product of any designer. Our mind supplies purposiveness to the objects of beauty though it does not possess any purpose behind it. According to the judgement of taste, an object is considered as beautiful not simply because it has some purpose behind it. According to Kant, judgement of beauty is the appreciation of the formal elements of an object which is considered to be beautiful. When we judge a bright coloured picture as beautiful, it is not because of the colour as colour is just an added attractiveness. The real beauty resides only in its form.

Kant talks about two types of aesthetic judgement which includes pure aesthetic judgement and impure aesthetic judgement. Pure aesthetic judgement is different from impure aesthetic judgement in such a way that pure aesthetic judgement does not depend on any rule or norms but, impure aesthetic judgement depends on some prior rules or ideas. For example, when a man judges the beauty of a newly constructed building on the basis of his previous understanding of the beauty of buildings, it is called impure aesthetic judgement. Here, the person follows some previous norms or rules to judge the beauty of the building. Again, the same building may be judged by a person as beautiful and by another person as not beautiful. Here, the first person judges the beauty of the building on the basis of some previous rules and the second person judges the beauty of the structure without depending on any previous rules. So, the judgement of first person is impure aesthetic judgement and the judgement of second person is pure aesthetic judgement.⁷

According to the fourth logical function called Modality, the aesthetic experience is necessary. “The beautiful is that which, apart from a concept, is cognized as object of a necessary delight.”⁸ The judgement of taste has a universal appeal though logically it does not demand it. It is not varied for different individuals as it is based on common feeling.

According to Kant the aesthetic judgments which are a priori are synthetic in nature. These are synthetic because when we judge an object as beautiful it is not just because of the quality of the object but because something is added to the object. With the help of certain principles of understanding we cannot judge an object as beautiful either empirically or a priori. We can judge an object as beautiful because there is a harmony between our imagination and understanding. Robert L. Zimmerman writes, “Aesthetic satisfaction is the awareness of the undesigned harmony between the imaginative representation and the understanding, i.e., that the former is ordered

⁴ *Ibid*, pp.51.

⁵ Murdoch, Iris. “*The Sublime and the Good*.” *Chicago Review*, Published by Chicago review, Vol.13, No.3, 1959, pp. 42-55.

⁶ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.66.

⁷ Crawford, Donald W. “*Giving in Kant’s Aesthetics*.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1970, pp. 505-510.

⁸ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.71.

and designed in itself in accordance with the latter's standards."⁹ Kant makes three divisions of imagination that are Productive, Reproductive and Free or Aesthetic Imagination. Productive Imagination helps us to understand the formation of concepts. Reproductive Imagination is the recollection of images which is left in our mind through the outer objects of intuition. Aesthetic or Free Imagination is also productive in character. It mediates between understanding and reason with the help of symbols. Ideas may be conceptual or non-conceptual. Aesthetic ideas are not conceptual like rational ideas. These are like symbols which cannot be known through the reason. With symbols, aesthetic imagination connects understanding and reason. Aesthetic imagination is free unlike productive and reproductive imagination. It is free because it is not the outcome of a priori principles of understanding.¹⁰

Beautiful and Sublime

According to Kant, beautiful and sublime are the two aesthetic aspects of nature. Beautiful and sublime agree at the point that both are directed to the feeling of pleasure. But there are some essential differences between beautiful and sublime. The beautiful in nature has connection to the form of the object, which has limitations but sublime has no connection with the limitations of the form, it is devoid of limits and forms. The delight we get through the beautiful is direct and hence has charm and playful imagination but the pleasure derived from sublime is indirect and has no charm and positive pleasure. Beauty in nature exhibit purposiveness in our imagination but the object of sublime is judged as the more sublime and cannot be comprehended by our imagination because of its vastness and formlessness. Beauty is associated with the notion of teleological law but sublime is associated with the wild and chaotic aspects of nature. In case of the judgement of beauty, there is a harmony between imagination and understanding but in case of the judgement of sublime, there is a harmony between imagination and reason.¹¹

Sublime may be of two types, mathematical sublime and dynamical sublime. In case of mathematical sublime, the object possesses supreme greatness which seems to be of infinite size in comparison to any other object. Here our imagination is unable to grasp the object entirely and hence the object possesses the impression of infinite size. Kant writes, "The sublime is that, the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses."¹² On the other hand, in case of dynamical sublime the object possesses the power which may arouse fear in our minds. When we see the outbreak of a volcano from a secured distance it possesses some elements of terror in our mind but still, we are not afraid of this because we know that we are safe from it. This kind of experience gives us the aesthetic pleasure in sublime. This kind of terror elevates us from the vulgar and makes us conscious about the power which enables us to evaluate the strength of the power of nature. We are thus, for the time being, raised through the fear of danger and death though we ourselves are the subject of them. The imaginary representation of dynamically sublime enables us to be conscious about our moral responsibility. This feeling of dynamical sublimity can be compared with the feeling that a devout man has for God. A devout man does the righteous action for the wellbeing of others and has no reason to scared of God as he is righteous in his actions. But still he is scared of God because he knows that the Laws of God should not be violated. According to Kant a moral law is also sublime from the aesthetic point of view.¹³

Kant gives more importance to nature than to art and literature. According to him art has more consideration on the teleological aspect because of which the pure aesthetic judgements get vitiated. Regarding art, Kant claims that there are two types of art namely mechanical art and aesthetic art. Aesthetic art is different from mechanical art. According to Kant, in case of mechanical art the artist has a purpose which controls the productive activity of an artist. For example, when an artist makes a pot from clay, he has a definite purpose or an end. The artist needs the pot or art object to serve or fulfil the purpose because of which it is made. So, here the pleasure derives from the utility of the art object. On the other hand, the purpose of aesthetic art is to give pleasure to others unlike mechanical art. Aesthetic art again can be divided into two forms namely, pleasant art and fine art. These art forms

⁹ Zimmerman, Robert L. "The Aesthetic Judgement." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 21, No.3, 1963, pp. 333-344.

¹⁰ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.54-55.

¹¹ Ward, Andrew. *Kant The Three Critique*. Published by Polity Press, 2006, pp. 203-204.

¹² Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.81.

¹³ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.90-94.

also differ in some case. Pleasant art does not have universal appeal. Pleasant art pleases only some particular sections of the people. For example, cooking may be pleasurable for some people but not for all. On the other hand, fine art has a universal appeal which is beyond the sensuous pleasure. For example, a beautiful object of nature makes us more aware about the harmony of our imagination and understanding. A work of art according to Kant is the representation of our aesthetic experiences which are perceptible through our sense organs. An art object may be judged as beautiful in the same way through which an object is judged as beautiful.¹⁴

Artist as a Genius

According to Kant an artist is born with some special quality called genius. Kant writes, "Genius is the talent (natural endowment) which gives the rule to art."¹⁵ Genius is a special gift of an artist given by nature. Without this quality a person cannot write a poem. The quality of an artist cannot be created, because it is natural. But though it is natural it is not completely free from training. According to Kant, an artist should not depend on any rule or principle to produce works of art, he can himself make any rule which is needed to produce attractive and beautiful art works.¹⁶ Therefore, Kant claims that art is not imitative. To be imitative art has to follow some rules or principles, but a genius who creates art works is free from any type of conceptual rules. So, an art work produced by a genius artist who is not dependent on any conceptual rule cannot be imitation. An artist reveals their ideas through some symbols which have universal appeal. Kant believes that rules or norms cannot provide any kind of standard in aesthetic judgements. In case of the creation of an art work also Kant believes that an artist is a genius who possess some special quality which is a special kind of gift given by the nature.

Kant holds that aesthetic pleasure is disinterested. The feeling of pleasure is independent of any utility it may serve. Kant is the exponent of the concept 'disinterestedness'. According to this, the pleasurable experience of attending to something in perception should not consist in liking a thing only because it fulfils some definite function, satisfies a desire or lives up to a prior standard or principle. Moreover, like Plato, Kant does not believe that art is a kind of imitation. According to Kant an artist is a genius and the quality of genius cannot be learned or trained, it is a natural quality which means that an artist is born with this special quality. But though this quality is natural it is not completely free from training. According to Kant an artist should not follow any conceptual rule rather an artist can make their own rule to produce an artwork. Therefore, Kant believes that art is not imitation, because to be an imitation art it should follow some rules and a genius who produce artworks is free from any kind of conceptual rule or principle.

Concluding Remark

Kant's concept of aesthetics is based on a fundamental problem which is eventually structured on an *antinomy* which is also known as *antinomy of taste*. According to this *antinomy of taste*, aesthetic judgement is in conflict with itself which means that it cannot be the expression of a subjective experience as well as a judgement, which claims universal agreement. People seem likely to make these judgements. In one way, people feel pleasure in an object which is immediate and not based on any conceptualisation or any inquiry of the cause or purpose. On the other hand, people express their feelings of pleasure in the form of judgements where beauty seems to be the quality of the object. Thus, their objective representation of pleasure is valid. But the question now arises is how the pleasure which is immediate, based on no reasoning, can have universal agreement. Tolstoy asserts, for Kant beauty "is, in its subjective meaning, that which in general and necessarily, without reasoning and without practical advantage, pleases; and in its objective meaning it is the form of an object suitable for its purpose in so far as that object is perceived without any conception of its utility."¹⁷

However, when we approach the concept of beauty this paradox emerges. Our aesthetic judgements have their direct relation to experience as no one can judge an object as beautiful without hearing or seeing. Scientific judgements such as practical rules or principles are second hand. One can take authority for the truths of physics or for the merits of a train. But one cannot take the authority of the value of the works of Leonardo or for the

¹⁴ Goswami, Trailokya Nath. *Aesthetic Theories Eastern and Western*. First Edition, Publication Board Assam, 2012, pp.56-57.

¹⁵ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. translated by James Creed Meredith, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.136.

¹⁶ Ward, Andrew. *Kant The Three Critique*. Published by Polity Press, 2006, pp.205.

¹⁷ Tolstoy, Leo. *What is Art and Essays on Art*. translated by Aylmer Maude, Oxford University Press, London, 1930, pp.97.

beauties of Mozart if one has not seen the works of Leonardo or has not heard the works of Mozart. From this we can infer that there cannot be any principles or rules for the judgements of aesthetics. Hence, it is the feeling of experience and not the concept that gives the value to aesthetic judgements. Therefore, according to Kant, aesthetic judgements are free from concepts and beauty also is not a concept. So, the first assertion of the antinomy of taste is the judgement of taste that is not based on concept, because if it is based on concepts, it may be open to argument and disagreement.

However, this type of statement or conclusion seems inconsistent with the fact that the aesthetic judgements are the forms of judgement. When one asserts something as beautiful it does not simply mean that it pleases that individual, because the individual is speaking about that particular object and not about himself, and if he is challenged, he may put some reasons for his judgement. So, the individual is not trying to explain his feeling rather he is trying to give the ground by pointing some features of the objects and this search for reason possesses the universal quality of rationality. Here emerges the second assertion of the antinomy that the judgement of taste must be based on concept, because, if it is not based on concept there would not be any space for argument about the matter or any necessary claim of agreement on others.

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