



The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement (Critique of Judgement 1)

Immanuel Kant , James Creed Meredith (Translator)

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Kant's attempt to establish the principles behind the faculty of judgment remains one of the most important works on human reason. This third of the philosopher's three *Critiques* forms the very basis of modern aesthetics by establishing the almost universally accepted framework for debate of aesthetic issues.

The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement (Critique of Judgement 1) Details

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From Reader Review The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement (Critique of Judgement 1) for online ebook

Carrie says

Does anyone actually understand this guy???????

Pablo says

I actually had to read and study it for a University exam, then i've found it suddenly interesting!

Skyler says

Interesting, not an easy read.

Nikki says

Another reading for Mythology & Philosophy course. We were assigned the "second book." If time allows, and especially if I utilize Kant in my research paper, I want to go back and read the "first book." The first book purely discusses beauty. The part we read is devoted to "Analytic of the sublime." I will admit that when I first sat down with this reading, I thought of how I just kind of have a fuzzy impression of "sublime." It's not a word/concept I've ever given much thought. I decided to look it up: "impressing the mind with a sense of grandeur or power; inspiring awe, veneration, etc." I figured that was a good start. When I started reading though, I realized that this definition was rather simplistic, as I ultimately had before me seventy pages of Kant exploring all of the variations and implications of "sublime."

To begin with, Kant does set up a clear distinction of "beautiful" and "sublime." To state it briefly, the beautiful is concerned with an object that has form, understanding, quality, play, pleasure and love; the sublime is concerned with a formless object, reason, quantity, emotion, respect, and esteem. I found Kant's discussion and dissection stirring and, well, shall I use the term??... beautiful! And, at times, perhaps, it was sublime for me. Beyond the object of the text, some passages elevated my mind, excited me with images or nature, and served to remind me of its captivation. Kant does look at the sublime in nature, which is ultimately glorious not exactly for how it looks/sounds but for what it IS. As the example Kant uses: if you believe to be listening to a nightingale, the experience will be wondrous; yet when you discover it was just a boy in the bush with an instrument, all charm is gone.

A colleague recently told me that the English translators have done Kant great justice. Apparently his original German form is not only more difficult to get through, but also not as impressive. I can't speak to this since I am limited (and I really do mean that in every sense of the word) to English. I really enjoyed this translation though and do believe I find myself falling in love with Kant! He recognizes a link between morality and nature, indicating that "to take an immediate interest in the beauty of nature is always a mark of a good soul." I believe he has a true understanding of the human condition and can speak to it and about it remarkably.

Lucas says

This is, to my mind, not Kant's strongest contribution to the history of philosophy, and I find it more difficult to read than even the most complex prose in the Critique of Pure Reason. I acknowledge it as a great work with significant cultural impact, but it is not a classic that I find inspiring enough to carry with me. There are better things in Kant, so I would advise finding them over this - Sapere Aude!

Charles says

it's that play drive that we gotta pay attention to. there are profound gems in here that can help propel a sort of aesthetic/political philosophy beyond the constraints that kant himself established.

Andrea says

its a revolutionairy vision of philosophy

Dickson says

This is not an easy read. Of course who said it would be? By just letting the words go before the eyes and not trying very hard to understand all the meanings seems to help with my comprehension. However, I wouldn't want to be tested on it. And I wouldn't go back to grad school and hang out with words like 'teleology' or people who like to bandy such words about for any amount of gold in my teeth.

Regina Andreassen says

One word: Magnificent! A book that should be read by academics of all the different disciplines and by all those who pursue deep knowledge and aim to understand the world from a holistic perspective.

Netsui says

Universality / non-universality of beauty, and beauty in question in general. Aesthetics and its relation to transcendentalism.

The ability to create which appears natural, effortless, provoking thought and consideration and create a whole new movement from that work.

Marc says

Witch's Pawn

Sachin says

One of the most important statements on Aesthetics but most the stuff went over my limited head.

Trevor says

So, you want to read some Kant and you think his Aesthetics might be as good a place to start as any? Well, be warned, this book was not written as a quick read. It is a hard slog, at least at the start, and probably does require at least a passing knowledge of just about everything else Kant ever thought about – but besides that, it is fascinating stuff.

Before we start, let's have some preliminary remarks on how to read Kant. The first thing to know is that he likes to frighten people off. He starts hard, really hard, he doesn't define any of his terms (believing that is something best left for the end of the discussion rather than the beginning) and a lot of those terms seems heart-sinkingly identical with each other (judgement, conception and attitude are all taken to be totally different from the beginning, but none are defined so that you can see what the differences he thinks are so important might be – he even has the audacity to say at one point that he has already explained these differences in his Critique of Pure Reason – to which he might as well say he left the key to the palace in a pretty little box at the bottom of the ocean).

He likes to use sentences that run for paragraphs and have so many sub-clauses and (worse still) relative clauses that twist and snarl that by the time you get to the end of one of these sentences you have no idea what he was talking about at the start. You often have to read the sentence and then go back and skip over lot of the relative clauses to get any idea of what he is talking about.

The first parts of his books generally contain everything he has to say on the subject in the most abstract and condensed way imaginable. You just know you are missing nine out of every ten ideas.

The point is to plod on. The best thing about Kant is that he repeats himself and gets easier to read as you go on. Not that you get used to he appalling style (no one ever gets used to that) but rather he literally becomes easier to read, writing simpler sentences and even explaining himself as he goes along – at the end of this one he was even telling jokes – I mean, funny jokes, jokes that even made me laugh.

This is my 'Kant for Kids' version of what he is on about here. Kant believes that everything we know about the world we get from our experience, but to get anything at all from our experiences of the world we need to have been born with ways of looking at the world (these he calls a priori categories) that allow us to structure the world in such a way as to help it make sense. If these didn't exist first, before we start looking at the world, all we would see would be a mess and a confusion – these a priori categories can't have been learnt from experience, as they are what we use to understand and structure our experience – they are ideas like cause and effect, space, time. We don't 'learn time' – time just is and we could never understand anything outside of our a priori ideas of time, or outside of space.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant essentially asks if our minds are up to the task of understanding the universe – that is, if you were going to buy a tool with which to understand the universe, would you pick human reason? His answer to this question is somewhat mixed – that human reason only lets us understand the world as it is displayed to human reason, not as it is in itself. None the less, if the a priori categories innate within us are a reasonable approximation of how the universe actually is (and we can't ever know if that is that case or not) then reason, based on the laws that come from these categories, gives us a pretty good idea of how the universe works.

Then there is the *Critique of Practical Reason* or his moral philosophy, which is not based solely on reason, but on a categorical imperative that Kant feels we need to believe is true.

Having divided the world into various categories and provided a basis for a moral philosophy, it is very interesting to see what Kant makes of his 'judgement of taste' or his theory of the beautiful and the sublime.

So, what is the beautiful? This is not as easy a question to answer as you might guess – and so, let's have a look at a rather controversial example – Leni Riefenstahl's film (which I've only ever seen exerts from) *Triumph of the Will*. Could such a film ever be considered beautiful? The problem is that a film glorifying Adolf Hitler is going to face one or two problems in the beauty stakes. The first is that Hitler's views are so repugnant that one would think that alone would condemn the film to the status of ugly. Kant would not agree with this assessment. Yes, it is reasonable to refuse to watch the film on the basis of its propaganda content, but this says nothing at all about whether, as a work of art, this film is beautiful or not. To Kant the political and moral questions associated with Nazism are all well and good, but they say nothing about a work of art or its beauty. To Kant, the question of beauty depends solely on formal considerations – and these considerations aren't really considerations – beauty is something that happens to us immediately, without thought.

Beauty is seen by Kant as being both subjective and universal. These are difficult terms and so let's look at what that means as it is very important. Because what Kant does not mean is 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'.

Our taste is subjective as there are no objective rules for judging beauty. Kant does not believe that beauty exists in things, he believes beauty is something inside our heads (or intestines, rather). When we look at something and consider it to be beautiful really this judgement says more about us than it does of the thing we are looking at. Kant believes that the beauty of a thing has nothing to do with what that thing is for or does, but rather is purely based on the form of the object and how complete it feels to us. An example is a flower – few of us, when we buy flowers for those we love, do so thinking, 'I really must get her the sexual organs of a plant'. The sexual organs we have in our minds when we buy flowers are very unlikely to be those of a plant's.

The beauty of a flower is completely divorced from the rational function of the flower. The beauty is tied up with our representation of the flower in our minds and how this affects our sense of taste. This is not a logical process (i.e. the appreciation of the beauty of a flower), but rather something that happens inside us. So, if you do ever see *The Triumph of the Will* and think that it is a beautiful piece of film making you probably then don't need to rush off to join the local skin-heads.

The judgement is not just reserved for telling if something is beautiful or not, but also if something is sublime. There is a lovely example given by Kant of the pyramids. If you are far enough away from the pyramids they do not look sublime, because they just look like little hills popping out of the desert. If you are too close they do not look sublime either as you can't really get a good enough perspective of them or see

them in all their awesome greatness. But if you are just the right distance away from them you still can't really take them in, however, your mind is overwhelmed by the effort and this brings about feelings of terror at their sheer size and wonder at their glory. That moment, the moment when our minds are overloaded, is the moment when we appreciate the sublime. This too is not really related to anything in the object itself, but rather in our own subjective response to the object. Like our response to the beautiful, the sublime is something that happens in our heads, not in the world.

And that means it is subjective – if it was objective we could say, 'oh, yes, looking at the sea will give you a feeling of the sublime', but that might only be the case if the sea is tossed by a storm, otherwise it may only look beautiful.

So, since taste is something that happens inside our heads it must be subjective – but why does Kant say it is also universal? To Kant we all share the same faculties that we use to view the world. Beauty, to Kant, is something that puts these faculties into a kind of free play. That free play is the source of the delight we feel when we look at something beautiful. But since we all have the same faculties, that means we all ought to find the same things beautiful.

Kant is quick to point out that we can have different tastes for some things, for instance, I'm not very fond of fish, but am very fond of certain red wines. It is not hard to imagine someone having the exact opposite preferences. However, this is not Kant's point – he does not see the beautiful as something like the taste of fish – and this use of the word beautiful is purely metaphoric for him. Also, the beautiful happens inside our heads, but it is not a concept – if it was a logical concept then we would be able to pin down exactly what it is that makes something beautiful and effectively photoshop the world so as to make it look like that. To Kant, a philosopher who held that nature was the ultimate crucible of all beauty, such a suggestion would have seemed preposterous.

The judgement of taste lies somewhere between our rational understanding and our moral feelings. As such, Kant believes that our appreciation of beauty is a powerful tool that can be used to aid our reason (our rational selves) in becoming more moral. This is a terribly interesting idea. By being increasingly in the presence of beauty we are increasingly less likely to be immoral. I can't help thinking of that scene in *Three Days of the Condor* where Max Von Sydow is painting little figurines in between shooting and bombing and killing. The scene's power comes from a paradox Kant would have been only too well aware.

There are a lot of things I like about Kant's view of aesthetics, not least that it is silly to bring in external ideas when we are judging whether something is beautiful or not. However, as with the *Triumph of the Will* example mentioned earlier, it is sometimes very hard to compartmentalise our brains in such a way that we can look at images of Hitler and then view them purely for their aesthetic appeal.

It is also true that art is not really limited to the idea of the beautiful, particularly not one so free flowing and disconnected from our reason or moral judgement as Kant requires it. I'm sure you don't need my permission to be revolted by *Triumph of the Will*, but just in case, my view is that if we need to turn off both our moral and rational brains to appreciate the beauty of something, then perhaps that beauty isn't really worth the effort involved.

All the same, this is a remarkable work by a remarkable philosopher. Reading Kant always shows me just how little my brain works like his.

JP says

Perhaps one element of good philosophy should be that the argument be at least moderately straightforward. Maybe Kant is just deep, but I perceive a lot of leaps to conclusions based on a huge amount of new, creative concepts as the springboard. I have not studied enough of this to be definite, but my suspicion is that Kant is considered a great philosopher by a brand of intellectuals that can use such indeterminate fluff to justify their views about how philosophy leads to current sociological and political trends. For example: "Skill can hardly be developed in the human race otherwise than by means of inequality among men." I rate this a 4 only because it holds such an esteemed spot in the development of modern philosophy, but it's not the type of argument that convinces me.

Ehren Clark says

Anyone interested in aesthetics, the logical ability we as human beings have to recognize and cogitate beauty and aspects of the empirical and the subjective interpretive perception of the objective would enjoy this work especially those interested in art critical theory should read this. As I read more and more I am amazed by the scope of Kant's vision and even though it is eighteenth century, it is still if not more relevant, of that which deals with aesthetics, than any book on critical theory available. Also it is more "readable" than the Critique of Pure Reason in that it uses examples to make points. Shorter, as this book is to the first critique, it is equally as charged, but as a side note the treatise on Reason should be read first.
