VII. The Limits of Moral Responsibility

In the introduction I warned that I would largely skirt the issue of moral responsibility. Here are two paragraphs on the issue, a promissory note, in fact, for a lengthy exposition to come. Libertarians raise the challenging question: if I cannot choose otherwise than as I do, then how is it morally fair to punish or reward me? Kant's position on legal punishment is clear: he simply appeals to our universal moral obligation to leave, and to refrain from re-exposing ourselves to, our natural condition; accordingly, the state and its citizens have an obligation to preserve the stability of the legal order (Recht) as the condition of justice. Punishment is justified as a necessary condition of the force of law constitutive of a stable legal order (RL, AA 06: 331). In brief, it is fair to punish me because it is fair to assume that I am committed to leaving the state of nature and entering into the legal framework of civil society. There is much more of this story to tell, but I can discern no grounds for supposing that subscription to compatibilism should make it undesirable to consent to the legal conditions of acceptance as a member of civil society.

Kant is careful, however, to distinguish institutional punishment from private judgments on individuals' characters (RL, AA 06: 332). So the question arises: what soon can compatibilists make for moral responsibility? Here is my proposal: moral blame is valid for the strictly forward-looking enterprise of moralischer Asketik, or "moral discipline" (RGV, AA 06: 50.25). Moral praise and blame have justification in moving individuals to take responsibility for their actions and for the practical attitudes (maxims) underlying them. An appropriate practice of praise and blame does not presuppose freedom in the sense that individuals could have chosen otherwise than they did; rather it presupposes freedom in the sense that individuals can choose otherwise than they have so far, and indeed, that they are obligated under moral law now to do so. Moral responsibility ought to be essentially forward-looking; the backward look is appropriate only in as far as evidence that one's attitudes are in violation of moral principles and that is to change now. So we reasonably hold agents responsible for their actions in the past inasmuch as these actions have had an impact on their self-scrutiny in the present, but we should be less interested in giving a testimony of an individual's evil character just for the moral satisfaction we take in doing so. We reasonably hold agents who violate principles of humanity and universal consistency responsible to change their practical attitudes and to do what they can to redress what wrongs they have committed. We reasonably require them to take responsibility for their past actions through changing themselves, through making right choices in the present and future. So much responsibility is compatible with determinism.

Reading Kant Hermeneutically: Gadamer and the Critique of Judgment

by Kristin Gjesdal, Philadelphia

The relationship between 20th-century phenomenology and the transcendental program launched by Immanuel Kant is crucial, but delicate. First there is Husserl, who seemed both attracted to and seriously critical of Kant's first Critique. Then there is Heidegger's ambition to scour the entire field of the three Critiques. Most important in this context, is probably his reading of the Critique of Pure Reason in Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (1929). Faithful to the notion of a salvaging "destruction" of the philosophical tradition, Heidegger argues that the earliest version of Kant's work, the so-called A-deduction, is radically different from the philosophy promoted by the neo-Kantians. Kant, he claims, was not really interested in epistemology in the narrow meaning of the term. He was, rather, a philosopher verifying upon a genuine ontology of being, but who, for reasons that remain unknown, felt forced to leave these tracks behind in order to pursue the transcendental conditions of knowledge. Then there is the second Critique, which Heidegger approaches through a discussion of the Kantian notions of freedom and causality. And, finally, there are his remarks about the Critique of Judgment, scattered all over his writing on art from the early 1930s onwards. However, Heidegger never produces a proper, systematic account of the relevance of the third Critique. Such an account, I argue in this essay, is provided by Hans-Georg Gadamer.


2 The idea of a phenomenological "destruction", as Heidegger initially would say, of a phenomenological Kritik, is introduced in 1919. At stake was the task of tracing theoretical constructions back to their less abstract context of the life-world. However, the work of destruction is soon expanded so as to cover our relationship to the philosophical tradition as well. What is to be destroyed - and Heidegger makes this clear already in Being and Time, §6 - is not really the text of tradition as such. No, under attack is our traditional understanding of these texts, the way in which we tend to take one or several given interpretations of a work more or less for granted. Hence the aim of the phenomenological destruction is to liberate the texts of tradition from tradition itself. This is an activity that aims at making classical texts come closer to us, to awaken them from the dead, as it were. In Heidegger's words, "to bury the past in nullity [Nichtigkeit] is not the purpose of this destruction; its aim is positive". See Heidegger, Martin: Being and Time. Transl. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. See Francisco 1962, §6. 21.
Gadamer's major work, *Truth and Method* (1960), was initially conceived as an essay on art and art-experience. Yet the first and oldest part of the work, "The Question of Truth as it Emerges in the Experience of Art", has received only scant attention. Furthermore, a closer examination soon reveals that the attention it has received does little to illuminate the subtlety of Gadamer's interpretation of the *Critique of Judgment*. Most frequently voiced — by critics such as Peter Bürge, but also, by more congenial commentators such as Jean Grondin — is the view that Gadamer mistakenly blames Kant for imprisoning art and aesthetic experience within the realm of subjective feeling.

This, however, is a blunt and unfortunate reduction of Gadamer's reading of the third Critique. Gadamer is, admittedly, critical of the idea of a pure aesthetic feeling. Yet this is not the only dimension of Kant's work that is of interest to him. For extending his focus from Kant's conception of taste and practical reasoning to his notion of the ideal of beauty, Gadamer uncovers no less than a hermeneutic approach to art. In this part of the Critique, he claims, Kant transcends the scope of pure, aesthetic judging. Art is taken to disclose a truth that is understood as a self-reflective encounter in the concrete, historical world.

Self-reflection, truth, and history — these are three unmistakably Hegelian topics. Nonetheless, in Gadamer's work, Kant's aesthetics is brought in not only to strengthen but also to modify a Hegelian understanding of art. Whereas Hegel famously claims that in modernity, art, as a reflection of the absolute, gets surpassed by philosophical reasoning, Kant insists that the meaning of the work can never be cashed out by conceptual or philosophical means. Although not entirely faithful to Kant's text — Gadamer, I shall argue, reads into the third Critique far too Hegelian an ethos — Gadamer's interpretation of Kant proves important to the development of his overall argument in *Truth and Method*. It is the encounter with the *Critique of Judgment* that allows Gadamer to elaborate, within the realm of art and art experience, a modern notion of dialogical rationality, thus ushering — salvaging by destroying, one might say — the path of hermeneutic reason into a new, post-Heideggerian venue.

The structure of my argument is this: Having rehearsed the basic outlines of Gadamer's critique of Kant's subjectivization of taste (sections I and II), I look at his retrieval of the hermeneutic dimensions of Kant's conception of art (sections III, IV, and V). I then continue by questioning the Hegelian premises of this reading (sections VI). Finally, I spend the remainder of the essay (sections VII, VIII, and IX) inquiring into the systematic gains of this strategy, arguing that Gadamer's (mis)interpretation of Kant's discussion of art allows him to sustain a notion of dialogical truth and rationality that is wide enough to embrace our relationship to both art and tradition in general.

For a philosopher whose ambition it is to explore the hermeneutic import of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Gadamer, from the very outset, adopts an unexpectedly polemical tone. To expound on Kant's aesthetics is, for Gadamer, to address "the subjectivization of aesthetics through the Kantian Critique" ([TM, 42; WM, 48]). Any engagement with Gadamer's reading of the third Critique must therefore involve an effort to come to terms with the idea that Kant's Critique represents a "subjectivization" of beauty and taste. How does Gadamer arrive at this idea? Is it not Kant's aim to show that the validity of aesthetic judging rests on an a priori principle, thus defeating the aesthetic relativism emerging in the wake of the empiricist approach to taste and beauty? Indeed it is, even according to Gadamer.

In the *Critique of Judgment* — at least the part of the work that Gadamer is interested in, namely the critique of aesthetic judgment (and not the teleology of nature) — Kant attempts to demonstrate that the judgment of taste may be granted an a priori principle of its own. This is why the *Critique of Judgment*, as the last of the three Critiques, offers such a novel approach to aesthetics.

Kant, to be sure, had been interested in the problem of taste for a long time. However, not until the late 1780s had he been able to find a way in which the judgment of taste could be connected with a transcendent principle. As such, the *Critique of Judgment* not only aspires to a deduction of the pure judgment of taste. It also contains an argument for the conditions of possibility for providing such a deduction in the first place. According to Gadamer, the *Critique of Judgment* is therefore not "a critique of taste in the sense that taste is the object of critical judgment by an observer. It is a critique of critique; that is, it is concerned with the legitimacy of such a critique in matters of taste" (ibid.).

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4 I return to Bürge's criticism below. Jean Grondin's argument — his claim that the first part of *Truth and Method* is little but a theoretical "détour" — is only indirectly addressed towards the end of the essay. Grondin speaks of the first part of Gadamer's work in *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. New Haven 1994, 110.

5 For an alternative, more detailed, and elaborate reading of the hermeneutic potential of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, see Makkeel, Rudolf A.: *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutic Impact of the "Critique of Judgment"*. Chicago 1990. Whereas Gadamer focuses on Kant's notion of artistic beauty (and the ideal of beauty in particular), Makkeel explores the hermeneutic impact of Kant's notion of imagination.

6 In the first Critique, Kant is known briskly to have rejected Baumgarten's "fruitless" endeavors to "bring the critical treatment of the beautiful under rational principles, and so to raise its rules to the rank of a science" ([CPFR, K/V, A 212/B 35, footnote]). This, however, changes throughout the later half of the 1780s. In 1787, Kant announces to Reinhold that he is now prepared to embark on the task of offering a "Critique of Taste". That is, he has discovered that "there are three faculties of the mind: the faculty of cognition, the faculty of pleasure and displeasure, and the faculty of desire", and that each of these faculties can be ascribed a transcendental principle of its own. Kant's letter to Reinhold is quoted from Zammito, John: *The Genesis of Kant's "Critique of Judgment"*. Chicago 1992, 461.
If the possibility of a deduction of the validity of pure aesthetic judging depends on the possibility of deducing a transcendental principle (for this type of judging), then it is the aim of the third Critique to answer the question as to what a transcendental principle within the area of taste would amount to, as well as to demonstrate that such a principle can in fact be found. Viewing Kant’s work as a “subjectivization” of taste, Gadamer can therefore not be claiming that Kant is unaware of the normativity inherent to pure aesthetic judging. Rather, what worries him is the very way in which normativity is grounded within Kant’s transcendental account of taste.

Like most 18th-century aestheticians, Kant is interested in the beautiful, and not, as the later romantics, in the ugly, the repulsive, or the object. Following the route of the first Critiques—the so-called Copernican turn in philosophy—Kant questions the view that beauty (that which is judged by the aesthetic judgment) is an intrinsic quality of objects in themselves. Strictly speaking, Kant claims, a judgment of the kind “x is beautiful” is not a judgment regarding the properties of an object “x” at all. It is a judgment about the feeling that the contemplation of this object induces in us. The feeling that Kant has in mind is the pleasure elicited by the free play of the cognitive powers, the imagination (die Einfühlungs-kraft) and the understanding (der Verstand). In our cognitive activities, these faculties cooperate by mutually curbing one another. The understanding is restricted in its application to what is given in intuition, while the imagination has to meet the understanding’s call for unity. In aesthetic experience, by contrast, the two faculties exist in a state of harmony. The imagination spontaneously synthesizes the given sensuous manifold so that it matches the demands of the understanding. This spontaneous cooperation—the free play of the faculties—induces a feeling of pleasure, one that differs from the sensuously pleasing as well as the pleasure we take in the morally good. As opposed to sensuous and morial pleasure, aesthetic pleasure is disinterested; it is not engaged with the actual existence of the object.

Kant’s investigation into the validity of aesthetic judgement has a precise and accurate focus. It is the beauty of nature and not the beauty of art that he is interested in (without, as we shall see, this meaning that he thereby cuts himself off from saying anything about art). Only the focus on natural beauty may help him solve the problem of bridging the gap between the notion of causality explored in the first Critique, and the concept of freedom that is entirely crucial to the second.

Natural beauty, on Kant’s understanding, directs our minds towards the idea of a higher purpose in nature. Aesthetically considered, the forms of nature appear to be designed in order to facilitate the work of the cognitive powers. Yet we have no criterion by which we can decide whether or not this is really—objectively—the case. The anticipation of a higher purposiveness of nature therefore occasions no cognitive claim, but remains subjective. However, this does not diminish the importance of this kind of purposiveness. Instead we here encounter a purposiveness of a peculiar kind, one that serves no purpose, save that of making human beings feel at home in the world. Kant speaks of this as a purposiveness without a purpose. This purposiveness without a purpose is the prior principle of the aesthetic judgment. And, as Kant has already spent the first Critique arguing that the cognitive powers must be the same in all human beings, he may now ascribe the judgment of taste with a transcendental dimension of validity, thus explaining how we, in our aesthetic judging, may legitimately demand the agreement of others, even if experience teaches us that, empirically regarded, taste is often diverse and discordant. At stake is what Kant calls a subjective universality, which differs from logical (or objective) universality in that it “does not connect the predicate of beauty with the concept of the object, considered in its entire logical sphere, yet it extends that predicate over the entire sphere of judging persons [weil sie das Prädicat der Schönheit nicht mit dem Begriffe des Objects, in seiner ganzen logischen Scharte betrachtet, vertieft und doch eben dasselbe über die ganze Schäre der Urthwellend ausdehnt].”

The notion of a subjective universality offers a background against which Gadamer’s criticism of Kant’s subjectivization of taste may be further expanded. Kant’s conception of aesthetic judgment, Gadamer argues, represents a subjectivization in two related, yet slightly different, meanings of the term. First, the Kantian Critique represents a “subjectivization” in that the normativity of aesthetic judgment is traced back to the free play of the cognitive faculties. The pure aesthetic judgment relates to a subjective seeing, and not to any objective features in the world. Second, the subjective universality of the aesthetic judgment deprives it of every cognitive claim. Grounding the validity of taste in the feeling induced by the free play of the cognitive faculties, Kant, in Gadamer’s view, “denies taste any significance as knowledge.”

7 Dieter Henrich sums this up rather nicely by suggesting that “The harmonious agreement of the cognitive powers […] is played in a particular sense, the mutual agreement comes about with no coercion, and the two activities come together automatically”. Henrich, Dieter: Kant’s Explanation of Aesthetic Judgment. In: Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World. Stanford 1992, 52.

8 As Kant puts it, in relation to the good, “what we like is not just the object but its existence as well. A judgment of taste, on the other hand, is merely contemplation, i.e., it is a judgment that is indifferent to the existence of the object: [subjective] the character of the object only by holding it up to our feeling of pleasure and displeasure. (Nicht bloß der Gegenstand, sondern auch die Existenz desselben gefällt. Dagegen ist das Geschmacksspiel bloß contemplativ, d. i. ein Urteil, welches, indifferent in Ansehung des Daseins eines Gegenstandes, nur seine Beschaffenheit mit dem Gefühl des Lust und Unlust zusammensammelt).” (CJ, KU, AA 05: 209, §5).

9 In the third Critique, Kant claims with regard to the aesthetic power of judgment that the subjective conditions of this power are the same as concerns the relation required for cognition as such between the cognitive powers that are activated in the power of judgment. This must be true, Kant continues, “for otherwise people could not communicate their presentations to one another, indeed, they could not even communicate cognition [weil sich sonst Menschen ihre Vorstellungen und selbst das Erkenntniss nicht mithalten könnten].” (CJ, KU, AA 05: 250, footnote, §38).
Deeming Kant’s account of aesthetic normativity a “subjectivization” of judgment, Gadamer in particular concerned with taste’s relation to knowledge. According to Kant, the judgment of taste is a reflective, as opposed to a determinative, kind of judging. Determinative judging proceeds by subsuming the particular under a general rule, principle, or law. Aesthetic judging, by contrast, moves from the particular to the universal, but without a universal at hand by which to make that move. Kant’s distinction between a judgment that issues from a universal rule and one that issues from the particular reflects a long and well-developed tradition. Furthermore, it is a distinction that has an unmistakable Aristotelian flair. In the Nicomachean Ethics, a work to which Gadamer constantly returns, the reflective type of judgment is closely connected to the logic of practical reasoning. It is, in the distinguishing mark of practical knowledge. As Gadamer puts it, practical knowledge shows itself through a kind of judging that “is delimited against any technical rationality” because here “the universal […] derives its determinacy by means of the singular.”

In Aristotle, however, the idea of reflective judgment was never carried out in the form of a philosophy of taste. To develop a notion of taste, in the modern meaning of the term, was simply not an option within the ancient Greek mindset. This, however, changes as time and centuries pass. For with the early, modern humanists, such as Baltasar Gracián, taste emerges as the domain of practical judgment per se. But taste, in this tradition, is not restricted to art and beauty. It is, as Gadamer puts it, “more a moral than an aesthetic idea” (TM, 35; WM, 40). For the early humanists,

10 “If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is determinative […] But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is termed reflective. (Lit das Allgemeine [die Regel, das Prinzip, das Gesetz] gegeben, so ist die Urteilsfähigkeit, welche das Bedürfnis darunter subsumiert, […] bemessen. Ist dies nur das Bedürfnis gegeben, worauf das Allgemeine finden soll, so ist die Urteilsfähigkeit bloß reflektierend.)” (CJ: XVI, AA 05: I, 179).


12 Gracián’s reading of Cicero is heavily indebted to Karl Borsinski’s interpretation. On Borsinski’s understanding, Gracián seeks to articulate “a moral anatomy of mankind,” hence also working out a new ideal of cultural formation (Bildungsideal). Borsinski, Karl: Baltasar Gracián und die Bildungsideal in Deutschland. Halle 1894, 24f.

According to Borsinski, taste holds a particular place within this ideal. It is not one out of several aspects of culture, but the root of culture as such: “Als ein allgemeines Kultur-ele- ment, und zwar als kein Nebeneinander, sondern als die Wurzel alles, ja als die treibs- Kraft der gesamten Kultur sehen wir also den Geschmack hingestellt.” (Ibid., 43.) In Borsinski’s view, the idea of taste as the root of culture is intricately connected to the rise of a new, bourgeois economy, the economy of the marketplace. Taste and sensus communes are, Borsinski argues, “ganz einfach aus dem unbedingten, damals geforderten Maßstab des Käufers und Verkäufers für die Objekte, für die Ware.” (Ibid., 44.) This aspect of Borsinski’s account is not at all brought into Gadamer’s discussion.

In addition to the polemical tone of the discussion of Kant’s subjectivization of reflective judgment, the call for a move beyond the aestheticization of taste has made a number of commentators conclude that Gadamer simply fails to acknowledge the hermeneutic relevance of the third Critique. Questioning what he takes to be the idealist drive of modern aesthetics, Peter Bürger, among others, argues that Gadamer develops his position by abstractly negating the Kantian tradition. This, he finds, betrays a major weakness of Gadamer’s position. By failing to appreciate the hermeneutic dimension of Kant’s Critique of Judgment, Gadamer not only misreads Kant. He also, and even more importantly, fails to live up to his own commitment to the idea of a continuous effective history. And, Bürger takes it, if Gadamer himself does not live up to his idea of effective history, who, after all, will? Bürger claims about Gadamer that “[s]eine eigene Konzeption einer ‘Ontologie des Kunstwerks’ nur im Bogen mit der Tradition die Ästhetik seit Kant einführte kann” (Bürger, Peter: Zur Kritik der idealistischen Ästhetik. Frankfurt am Main 1983, 15.)
However, Bürger jumps too hastily to his conclusion. Gadamer's reading of the third Critique does not conclude with the discussion of taste and judgment, but encompasses a thorough engagement with Kant's understanding of art as well. Due, perhaps, to the widespread interest in the hermeneutic concept of practical knowledge and normativity — an interest fueled by the so-called Gadamer-Habermas debate — this aspect of Gadamer's discussion has never received the attention it deserves. Hence one may easily overlook how Gadamer, having criticized the subjectivization of taste in Kant's Critique of Judgment, goes on to modify his claims by arguing that hermeneutics should not only distinguish itself from the general orientation of Kant's work, but also understand itself as heavily indebted to the insights espoused by the third Critique.

IV

In the Critique of Judgment, Kant distinguishes between four aspects (or "moments") of taste. Gadamer launches his discussion of Kant's notion of art by carefully examining a few excerpts from the third moment, that is, Kant's analysis of the judgment of taste according to its relation. Here Kant argues that the possibility of offering a deduction of the (subjective) universality of taste depends on the possibility of distinguishing the pure judgment of taste from the type of judging that is based on a conceptual determination of the object considered. Kant addresses this issue through a discussion of the difference between free and dependent beauty in §16. Free beauty presupposes no concept. Dependent beauty, by contrast, does. Only when one is judging free beauty can the judgment of taste be pure (see Cj, KU, AA 05: 229, §16).

Natural beauty, Kant argues, provides the ultimate example of free beauty. We need not know what an object of nature is or represents in order to appreciate it aesthetically. No concept is required in order to take pleasure in the contemplation of its forms. Congratulating free beauties such as, for instance, flowers, "[h]ardly anyone apart from the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is [means] to be; and even he, while recognizing it as the reproductive organ of a plant, pays no attention to this natural purpose when he judges the flower by taste [Was eine Blume für ein Ding sein soll, weiß außer dem Botaniker schließlich sonst jemand; und selbst diesen, der das Befruchtungsgeschehen der Pflanze erkennt, nimmt, wenn er darüber durch Geschmack urteilt, auf diesen Naturzweck keine Rücksicht]" (Cj, KU, AA 05: 229, §16). Here, the imagination synthesizes the sensuous manifold without being limited by a notion of objective purposiveness, i.e., the question as to what a thing, such as a flower, "is meant to be" and how it lives up to this determination.

Entering the world of human practice, however, the example of free beauty gets increasingly problematic. As opposed to natural beauty, "the beauty of a human being [...] or the beauty of a horse or a building (such as a church, palace, army, or summer-house) does presuppose the concept of the purpose that determines what the thing is [means] to be [die Schönheit eines Menschen [...] die Schönheit eines Pferdes, eines Gebäudes [als Kirche, Palast, Arsenal oder Gartenhaus] setzt einen Begriff vom Zweck voraus]" (Cj, KU, AA 05: 230, §16). Domesticated animals, people, and buildings appear within the realm of human ends and intentions. Thus, salization, our task is, rather, the destruction of one by the other in the violence of their difference. This difference cannot demand, even subjectively, to be communicated to all thought.


It is worth noting that the turn towards the aesthetically sublime is not a theoretical move only. Lyotard's argument was anticipated as early as 1948 by the artist Barnett Newman. Defending what he takes to be a genuinely American (as opposed to European) painting, Newman turns to the formlessness of the sublime. In European painting, he argues, "[h]uman desire to the Absolute became identified and confused with the absolutes of perfect creations — with the finish of quality — so that the European artist has been continually involved in the moral struggle between notions of beauty and the desire for sublimity. Sublimity, he goes on, "consists of a desire to destroy form, to reach the point where form can be formless. This latter aspect of painting, being finally concluded, is cultivated in America, where artists "feel free from the weight of European culture". Newman, Barnett: The Sublime is Now In: Selected Writings and Interviews. New York 1990, 171 and 171-173.
it seems, we can hardly judge (a representation of) these objects without considering their place within the field of human practice, that is, without considering their purpose. However, this purpose hardly comes across as a purposefulness without purpose. It is not a purposefulness devoid of aims, save the subjective aim of generating aesthetic pleasure. Hence, we face the risk that the aesthetic judgment gets contaminated by a determinative (objective) purpose, that it is no longer purely aesthetic. Informed by a criterion such as perfection, the judgment would instantly lose its purity. This, Kant argues, had been the case with Baumgarten’s aesthetics. Appealing to the criterion of perfection, Baumgarten had been opting for a didactical model according to which beauty is granted no value in itself, but is appreciated only to the extent that it prepares for a conceptual grasp of the contemplated object. But reduced to a mere means, Kant remarks, beauty would be worth no more than the honey with which one may bribe a child to do something that is experienced as unpleasant or slightly scary.

A beauty that is conceived along the lines of such pragmatic considerations would not be free but “obscured and limited”, as Gadamer puts it (TM, 45; WM, 51). The problem here is not really Kant’s rejection of the criterion of perfection within the sphere of aesthetic judgment. Gadamer takes no interest in rehabilitating an aesthetic model that is geared towards the perfection of the aesthetic object. The problem, rather, is the extension ascribed to this area by Kant. Indeed, as Gadamer reads him, it applies for Kant that every object designed in light of human intentions is potentially prone to be judged according to the criterion of perfection (or its capacity to serve as a means to some external end). For within this area, Kant includes “the whole realm of poetry, of the plastic arts and of architecture, as well as all the objects of nature that we do not look at simply in terms of their beauty” (ibid.). Thus, to the extent that we follow Gadamer’s reading, every representative art is, in other words, barred from Kant’s definition of beauty, and thus also from the scope of pure aesthetic judgment. Provided one does not conceive of the third Critique as an overly “modernist” defense of aesthetic abstraction – as Clement Greenberg tends to do – Kant’s conception of aesthetic judgment seems unfit to ac-


18 In Greenberg’s work, aesthetic modernism is identified with “the intensification, almost exacerbation, of (the) self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant”. Within the realm of painting, Greenberg claims, modernism takes the shape of an investigation into the medium of the painterly itself: “Realistic, illusionary art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art. Modernism used art to call attention to art.” Greenberg, Clement: Modernist Painting. In: The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 4. Ed. by John O’Brien. Chicago 1993, 85.


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accommodate any work of art, save the arabesque or other merely decorative or ornamental expressions.19 However, as Gadamer argues, such a conclusion would not do justice to the complexity of Kant’s work. For in relation to issues such as the decoration of the human body (tattoos) or the ornamental decoration of a church, Kant is quick to emphasize that this kind of beauty, in spite of its formal capacity to induce the free play of our cognitive faculties (thereby evoking the feeling of aesthetic pleasure), is far from recommendable, and that this is due to moral considerations. What happens here – and Gadamer finds this to be of vast importance – is that Kant brings into his discussion of the judgment of taste an extra-aesthetic aspect, that of reason and morality. Kant’s point in this context is therefore not really to warn against the ornamentation of the human body or the decoration of the sacred space, but to suggest that our judgment on symbolic beauty, in spite of losing its purity, may gain from a reference to reason and morality.

According to Gadamer, the aim of §16 is thus to clarify the distinction between two different ways in which the judgment of taste may relate to concepts: with regard to the perfection of the aesthetic object, or with regard to its moral reference. This distinction allows Kant to reject the kind of conceptual reference that departs from the idea of the object’s perfection (according to its empirical concept), while at the same time maintaining taste’s relation to morality (rational concepts). As Gadamer puts it, taste’s relation to empirical concepts is rejected as it restricts the freedom of the imagination, while its relation to the rational concepts is maintained because here our “looking to a concept” does not abrogate [aufheben] the freedom of the imagination” (TM, 46; WM, 52).

In other words, on Gadamer’s reading, Kant does grant that there are cases in which we may, legitimately, allow our aesthetic judgment to be aided by intellectual references, even at the cost of such a judging losing its purity. The imagination, Gadamer explains, is simply “not richest where it is merely free [...], as in the convolutions of the arabesque, but rather in a field of play where the understanding’s desire for unity does not so much confine it as suggest incitements to play” (ibid.).

19 According to Gadamer, the only way to avoid concluding that such a conception of beauty cannot pay justice to art would be to regard taste as a mere pre-condition (Vorbedingung). The real work of art is the pure judgment of taste as a necessary, yet not sufficient, condition, one which, upon encountering the artistically beautiful, would stand in need of further completion. The strongest candidate for such a completion would, Gadamer proposes, be the concept of genius. However, even if the concept of genius might thus be anticipated already in §16, it is, as Gadamer points out, not yet given any explicit elaboration. Such an elaboration is only offered in §46. In §16, on the other hand, the standpoint of taste seems to offer an exhaustive account of the nature of aesthetic judgment, protecting it from any introduction of intellectual criteria or standards of evaluation. Accordingly, Gadamer may conclude that for Kant, “[t]rue beauty is that of flowers and of ornaments, which in our world, dominated by art, present themselves as beauties immediately and of themselves, and hence do not require that any concept or purpose be consciously disregarded.” (TM, 45; WM, 51).
This, however, is a conclusion that anticipates the point brought forth in §17, where Kant continues his examination of the relation between the judgment of taste and the possibility of a conceptual or intellectualized aesthetic liking.

V

The relation between taste and reason (rational concepts) makes it possible for Kant to argue that whenever a conflict occurs within the area of taste, two judges with conflicting opinions may in theory lay equal claims to validity: One may be right according to the intellectualized (moral) interest she takes in the object, the other according to a pure aesthetic liking. Yet such conflicts are not the rule. On the contrary, Kant remarks that surprisingly often these different approaches to art exist in peaceful harmony. This leads him to address the possibility of there being a deeper, common ground behind our judgments on art and beauty.

If such a ground exists, then we know already that it cannot be of a conceptual nature. There is, Kant has argued, no objective rule of taste. The reflective judgment is an aesthetic judgment; it is based on a subjective feeling induced by the disinterested contemplation of a beautiful form and not on a concept of the object itself. The search for a conceptual criterion of taste is therefore a search in vain. Hence Kant goes on to address the possibility of there being an archetype of taste. Such an archetype would, he suggests, be a "mere idea [...], as an idea which everyone must generate within himself and by which he must judge any object of taste, any example of someone's judging by taste, and even the taste of everyone [else] (eine bloße Idee [...], die jeder in sich selbst hervorbringen muß, und whomach er alles, was Object des Geschmacks, was Beispiel der Beurtheilung durch Geschmack sei, und selbst den Geschmack von jedem man beurtheilen muß)” (CJ: KU, AA 05: 232, §17). Idea properly, Kant continues, means a rational concept. When a rational concept is given a concrete expression, it appears as an ideal of beauty. Rooted in "reason's indeterminate idea of a maximum [der unbestimmten Idee der Vernunft von einem Maximum]", the ideal of beauty cannot "be presented [...], through concepts but only in an individual exhibition (nicht auf Begriffen, sondern auf der Darstellung beruhnt)" (ibid.). As such, it is an ideal of the imagination.

Given Kant's distinction between free and dependent beauty (and the way in which he, at least according to Gadamer, tends to approach the work of art in terms of the latter), one has to ask at this point what kind of beauty could possibly be susceptible to such an ideal of the imagination. Although such a beauty would not be one that could be determined by a concept, it would have to be partly fixed by it. It would have to belong to an aesthetic judgment that is, in Kant's phrasing, "partly intellectual [zum Theil intellektülen Geschmacksurteil]" (ibid.). Thus we can a priori exclude from the ideal of beauty the non-conceptual beauty of flowers or a beautiful view (Kant's own examples). How, then, about the kind of beauty that has a specific purpose, the beauty pertaining to objects that belong to the world of human means and ends? In these cases, Kant argues, the purpose of the object is not "sufficiently determined [genug bestimmt]" and may depend on practices that are contingent as well as diverse. This kind of beauty is therefore "nearly as free as is the case of vague beauty [beinahe so frei ist, als bei der vagen Schönheit]", that is, the beauty which is not fixed by any concept at all (CJ: KU, AA 05: 233, §17). The question is thus whether or not Kant, given the philosophical resources of the third Critique, is able to uncover a kind of beauty that has a conceptual reference, without thereby being externally determined by it.

Following the outline of Kant's argument, such a beauty would be related to the presentation of a being that has its purpose as an inherent part of its own existence. According to Kant, however, only human beings meet such a requirement. Only "[m]an can himself determine his purposes by reason [Nur das, was den Zweck seiner Existenz in sich selbst hat, der Mensch, der sich durch Vernunft seine Zwecke selbst bestimmen [...] kann]", as he puts it (ibid.). Through the faculty of reason, human beings give themselves their own purpose. The purpose of a human being is in other words intrinsic to humanity as such. This is why a human being, as we know from Kant's moral philosophy, should never be reduced to a mere means. Humanity is, intrinsically, an aim in itself. Of all beings in the world, only humans would be susceptible to an ideal of beauty.

As much as he initially was skeptically inclined towards Kant's subjectivization of taste and judgment power, the notion of the ideal of beauty is one that Gadamer approves of. As he explains, there is "an ideal of beauty only of the human form precisely because it alone is capable of a beauty fixed by a concept of end" (TM, 47; WM, 53). Between vague, conceptually underdetermined beauty, on the one hand, and conceptually overdetermined beauty, on the other, Gadamer is pleased to see Kant uncover a third alternative: a kind of beauty that has an intellectual reference, yet remains undetermined by external constraints. While contemplating the beautiful presentation of humanity, the intellectual pleasure that we take in this presentation does not, in Gadamer's words, "distract us from the aesthetic pleasure but is rather one with it" (TM, 48; WM, 54).

According to Gadamer, Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty is therefore the place to look for the hermeneutic potentials of the third Critique. It is a discussion, he finds, that shows "clearly how little a formal aesthetics of taste [arabesque aesthetics] corresponds to the Kantian idea" (TM, 47; WM, 53). More importantly, Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty leads to an insight of even broader philosophical import, namely the idea that (our interest in the) artistically beautiful is related to the possibility of a self-encounter. In the experience of art, human beings face their own humanity. At stake is a dialogical relation in which the parties are simultaneously one (work as well as recipient take part in the realm of human meaningfulness and symbol-use) and divided (into artwork and recipient). Only through the development of such a "dialogical" concept of the artwork, Gadamer argues, "can 'art' become an autonomous phenomenon" (TM, 49; WM, 55, emphasis added).
The importance of this claim can hardly be overestimated. What Gadamer proposes is that in Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty, autonomy is not conceived of in terms of the aesthetic judgment's claim to validity (subjective universality), but in terms of the specific form of "self-sufficiency" that is part of the idea, further to be developed by Hegel, of art as an expression of self-reflecting spirit.20

However, self-reflection - self-understanding, one might even say - implies a dimension of knowledge. Connecting art and reason, Kant thus moves beyond the idea, decisive for his notion of the pure judgment of taste, that our engagement with the beautiful is void of cognitive interest. He realizes, as Gadamer puts it, that "something must be more than merely tastefully pleasant in order to please as a work of art" (TM, 47; WM, 53), hence also that "[t]he very recognition of the non-conceptuality of taste leads beyond an aesthetics of mere taste" (TM, 49; WM, 55, emphasis added).

Consequently, on Gadamer's reading, Kant's third Critique does not only limit and illegitimately curb the scope of aesthetic judgment. More significantly, it hints at a wider, hermeneutically relevant notion of truth and knowledge. Contrary to what one would expect to be the case if judging from the broad tone of Gadamer's initial discussion, it is Kant himself who points out the way beyond the narrow notion of pure aesthetic judgment. He does so because he manages, as Gadamer has claimed, to overcome this notion on two related, but nevertheless slightly different levels; First, without appealing to the criterion of perfection or to empirical concepts, he shows that our experience of art benefits from the impure reference to rational concepts. Second, he hints at how this conceptual reference implies a dimension of knowledge that transcends the realm of science proper: the notion of knowledge as self-knowledge.

In order to overcome the twin restrictions of Kant's subjectivation of taste and his non-hermeneutic notion of knowledge in the Critique of Pure Reason, one has to go beyond the scope of Kant's account of pure, aesthetic judging, but not beyond the intellectual framework of his philosophy as such. This - and not a stern and unmediated critique of Kant - is the philosophical gist of Gadamer's encounter with the Critique of Judgment.

VI

It is one thing to argue, as Gadamer has so far been doing, that Kant's notion of the ideal of beauty transcends the restrictions of pure aesthetic judgment. It is quite another to show that the very way in which Kant points beyond the limitations of pure taste anticipates a hermeneutic (in Gadamer's meaning of the term) conception of art and experience. However, it is precisely this - the wish to show that Kant, while transcending the purity of the judgment of taste, develops a hermeneutic understanding of art - that leads Gadamer to focus on Kant's conception of the ideal of beauty in the first place.

In order to show how Kant's conception of the ideal of beauty aspires to something like a hermeneutic understanding of art, Gadamer must bring into his interpretation an additional premise. Not only will he have to argue that Kant's notion of the ideal of beauty permits us to think of aesthetic experience as a self-encounter of spirit. He must also claim that the notion of an ideal of beauty allows us to think of this encounter in concrete, historical terms. For as suggested by his appropriation of the early humanist conception of taste and practical reasoning - against which Kant's transcendental account of the normativity of taste was initially contrasted - a hermeneutic reason is not abstractly determined. It is situated within the context of a given, historical life-world. Towards the end of his interpretation of the Critique of Judgment, §17, Gadamer thus lets us know that Kant's conception of the moral relevance of the artwork steers us towards the idea of art's ability to "enable man to encounter himself in [...] the human, historical world" (ibid., emphasis added).

Gadamer's claim finds little backing in the Critique of Judgment. In §17, Kant argues that the moral relevance of art consists in its capacity to exhibit a wide range of abstract moral deeds. What Kant has in mind is the work's capacity to voice the universal ideals of reason - "everything that our reason links with the morally good: goodness of soul, or purity, or fortitude, or serenity, etc., [all of which] are the possessor of the true good in the highest perfection and the highest happiness and the true good in the highest perfection and the highest happiness" (Kant, "On the Human Being as a Moral End," §17) - not its ability concretely to express the ethical-political horizon of a given, historical world. According to Kant, the work of art that tends to evoke our full interest is that which presents us with a set of ideals for which reason inevitably strives, but for whose actual realization in this world it can only hope.

Gadamer's argument is confusing not only because it ascribes to Kant a good deal more than can actually be justified with reference to §17, but also because he does, at this point, risk undermining his own critique of Kantian morality. For while expressing his sympathy towards Gracián's defense of the co-presence of taste and morality, Gadamer claims that with Kant, the concept of morality is reduced to an abstractly universal imperative, the exercising of the "sens law of pure practical reason" (TM, 33; WM, 38). This, however, is a conception of reason that differs substantially from a dialogical reason expressing itself through a "human, historical world". In order to sustain the coherence of his argument, Gadamer would at this point have to moderate one of his two claims. He would either have to grant to Kant a more comprehensive notion of moral life in the first place, or he would have to make clear that Kant, while proposing the idea of a self-encounter in the work of
This is a view that Gadamer does not share. Any account of art, he argues, must, from the very outset, acknowledge that the truth of art cannot be rendered in terms of definitive knowledge (abschließende Erkenntnis). There is, Gadamer claims, "no absolute progress and no final exhaustion of what lies in a work of art" (TM, 100; WM, 105). Kant, he reckons, recognized this. It is the achievement of the third Critique "to dissolve the subordination of art to conceptual knowledge without at the same time eliminating the significant relation of art to conceptual understanding." In Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty, the artwork is granted the capacity to elicit a process of self-understanding — be it, strictly speaking, moral (as in the Kantian meaning of the term) or more generally ethical-political (as in the Hegel-Gadamer interpretation) — without threatening the autonomy of aesthetic expression vis-à-vis conceptual reason. Art is granted a cognitive dimension, yet cannot be appropriated by conceptual reason itself. Against what he takes to be Hegel's tendency to hypostatize the omnipotence of conceptual knowledge, Gadamer wants to justify "art as a way of truth in its own right" (TM, 98; WM, 104).

This is why Gadamer, in working out the premises of a hermeneutical philosophy of art, turns to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, and not only to Hegel's "admirable lectures on aesthetics" (TM, 98; WM, 103) — and it is why he does so in spite of the obvious philological and interpretive problems generated by such a move.

Observing how Gadamer reach into Kant's notion of the idea of beauty a hermeneutical awareness of the self-encounter in the work of art, while, at the same time, maintaining a versatile idea of the artwork's autonomy vis-à-vis conceptual reason, one cannot help asking how this reading is brought to bear on his overall approach to hermeneutic truth and rationality. For as part of an attempt to defend the criticism launched by Bürger — i.e., that Gadamer's relation to the third Critique is exclusively a negative one — the contours of an objection emerge. Although one might possibly concede that Gadamer's interpretation of the third Critique influences his own concept of art, it might still turn out to prove fairly irrelevant to his understanding of knowledge, truth, and rationality.

22 However, if Gadamer is critical to Hegel's end-of-art thesis, he does not for that reason celebrate the more reductive interpretations of this idea. In his opinion, Hegel's formulation of the end of art points to something essential ("es trifft etwas Wesentliches"). The end-of-art thesis does not imply that art is deprived of a future, but that it, in essence, is always past: "Hegels Lehre von dem Vergangheitscharakter der Kunst [meint] nicht in enster Linie, daß die Kunst keine Zukunft mehr habe, sondern daß sie in ihrem Wesen immer schon vergangen ist, wenn sie auch fortbildung mag, bis in welche Zukunft immer." "Ende der Kunst" (1985), GW, vol. 8, 207 and 204.

23 "Intuition and Veridicalness", 164; "Ausschauung und Anschaulichkeit", 196.
However, such a response would rest on feeble evidence. Gadamer repeatedly accentuates how philosophy and art are intertwined in his hermeneutics. Alluding to the poetic imperatives of Stefan George, he claims that it simply was not possible for him to “ignore the fact that the experience of art had something to do with philosophy”, and that “the price that the university philosophy of the post-Hegelian era has to pay for its failure to recognize this [...] is [its] barrenness.”

Even more important in this context is the fact that Gadamer’s engagement with the third Critique – at least as spelled out in his reading of §§ 16 and 17 – is driven by the suspicion that Kant here hints at a conception that neither reduces art to a question of bare (sensory) impressions nor takes it to be solely a matter of conceptualized ideas or knowledge. Kant, he claims, is after a third alternative: a conception of truth that is so comprehensive as to embrace our relation to art, but which nonetheless reflects that the truth of art is non-conceptual by nature. Hence, Gadamer’s discussion of the third Critique is no prolegomena to his discussion of reason, truth, and knowledge. It is an entirely essential part of it.

However, if Gadamer’s discussion of the Critique of Judgment is a part of his discussion of reason, truth, and knowledge, one ought to ask to what extent his reading of the third Critique influences his understanding of these concepts. Even if we have not yet received any explicit answer to this question, a possible candidate for a reply has already been hinted at. What I have in mind is Gadamer’s critique of Hegel’s conception of the sublation of the truth of art, as the sensuous expression of the absolute, into religion and philosophy.

Although Gadamer is the first to admit that only Hegel succeeds in spelling out the full, hermeneutic potential of the third Critique, he still blames him for illegitimately sacrificing the autonomy of aesthetic expression and experience in favor of a monolithic notion of conceptual reason. If Hegel ascribes to art a dimension of cognitive validity, he also deems its truth not only subordinate to but also capable of being transposed into the realm of conceptual thinking. Art is granted no capacity to question the sovereignty of conceptual reason. Gadamer, by contrast, wants to pursue this aspect of art. Hence he introduces into the discussion of art and knowledge an explicitly non-Hegelian premise, namely the idea that the work of art, due to its non-discursive qualities, may challenge the way in which our idea of conceptual truth, reason, and knowledge has come to monopolize our understanding of reason, truth, and knowledge as such.

I have argued that Gadamer, in discussing Kant’s conception of the ideal of beauty, takes the experience of art to be dialogical. It is an experience in which spirit meets spirit, one in which self-reflection and knowledge are at stake. Yet, as realized in the work of art – as concretized in a sensuous (symbolic) manifestation – truth (that towards which we, in the dialogical encounters, are directed) cannot be exhausted by conceptual interpretations or claims. As symbolic, the truth of art tran-

24 "Zwischen Phänomenologie und Diakritik. Versuch einer Selbstkritik" [1985], WM, vol. 2, 7; an English translation of this essay is included as part of Gadamer’s "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey", LLP, 43.

The idea of dialogical reason was initially elaborated in Gadamer’s early work on Plato. In Plato’s Dialectical Ethics – published in the early 1930s, that is, in the period where Gadamer’s reading of the third Critique took shape – Gadamer attributes to Plato a process-oriented conception of reason. Critically alluding to Paul Natorp’s understanding of the Platonic idea as scientific hypotheses, Gadamer argues that Plato was “no Platonist” in Natorp’s meaning of the term. Plato offered no doctrines. His philosophy was open-ended and dialectical – it was, in short, Socratic. The Socratic-Platonic way of philosophizing is therefore not something that exists, as it were, along with or independent of Plato’s philosophical position. On the contrary, the dialogical aspect of Plato’s writing works back on – and is essentially tied up with – his conception of truth, rationality, and knowledge in the first place. As Gadamer puts it, Plato’s philosophy is a dialectic not only because in conceiving and comprehending (im Begreifen) it keeps itself on the way to the concept (zum Begriff) but also because, as a philosophy that conceives and comprehends in that way, it knows man as a creature that is thus ‘on the way’ and ‘in between’. It is precisely this that is Socratic in this dialectic, that it carries out, itself, what it sees human existence as. This is not sophia – the knowledge that gives one disposition over something – but a striving for that. (PDE, 4; PDE, 6f.)

This understanding of knowledge as a dialogical practice is more or less buried at the moment of its being preserved in the forms of Platonic dialogue. From Aristotle and onwards, “philosophizing is no longer the carrying out of a shared philosophical process” (PDE, 5; PDE, 8). In Gadamer’s formulation, it is Aristotle’s questionable honor to be “the first theoretician” (ibid.). Furthermore, Gadamer claims that...
as academic (theoretical), all post-Platonic philosophy is "Aristotelian". "All scientific philosophy", Gadamer claims, "is Aristotelianism insofar as it is conceptual work" (PDE; 8; PdE, 10).

It is only when encountering this predicament, aporetic as it may seem, that it becomes evident why the work of art plays such an important role in Gadamer's hermeneutics. Precisely because art cannot be conceptually exhausted, precisely because art, past as well as present, offers a kind of self-understanding that is always underway, can the work of art remind us of what philosophy sacrificed on becoming "Aristotelian". However, in order to play such a role, art must be ascribed a relative autonomy vis-à-vis conceptual thought. It cannot, as in Hegel's lectures, appear as a reflective mode of discursive reason. What Hegel took to be the particular limitation of artistic truth, namely that it allows for no conclusive (absolute) knowledge, constitutes, in Gadamer's view, its particular strength - a strength that is given its first, historical articulation in Kant's discussion of the ideal of beauty in the Critique of Judgment.

Abbreviations.

Works by Hans-Georg Gadamer.

PdE Platos dialeitische Ethik. G.W. vol. 5, 3-164.

Works on Hans-Georg Gadamer.


Works by G. W. F. Hegel.