Chapter Four

Aesthetic Evaluation, Subjectivism

1. Taste and Common Sense

According to Kant, the most crucial problem for aesthetics is the antinomy of taste: we argue a lot about aesthetic matters, and rightly so, but at the same time we are convinced that no mechanical test could prove a judgement of taste, nor may we base our judgements on the testimony of other people. We hold the principle of acquaintance. We seem to have to see for ourselves, and are more or less at a loss if we try to find a set of principled considerations to help us in judgement. Nevertheless, as Hume remarked, we seem to agree that some works of art are more valuable than others.\(^1\) Kant argues that if a principle of taste exists it certainly will not consist in an enumeration of prevalent judgements, nor will it be a logical principle that would enable us to prove a thing’s beauty from its properties.\(^2\) Kant’s aesthetic theory can be read as an account of this antinomy of taste starting with an analysis of the claims we make in aesthetic discourse. Kant distinguishes pure judgements of taste from judgements depending somehow on conceptual constraints. Both types of judgement involve a subjective purposivity which is described in terms of the cognitive faculties playing freely. However illuminating this is, Kant’s account of the alleged universal validity of these judgements in terms of a common sense is puzzling.

Kant takes taste as a typical instance of common sense and as entailing recognition of our presupposing common sense’s existence, but leaves suspended the general question of how exactly common sense relates to the judgement of taste. In more detail, Kant associates this common sense with a reasonable and non-specific demand for consent; it is the condition of

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\(^{1}\) In Hume, ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, 1969.

\(^{2}\) In § 17 of the Critique of Judgement, and again in § 34. I cite the B-edition from 1793, and these later editions: Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, 1974 (Henceforth: KU, B, S) and Meredith’s translation: Kant, The Critique of Judgement, 1952 (1793) (Henceforth: CJ, M).
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‘communicability as such’; that which makes us demand of other people that they respond to a certain object as we did. As such Kant takes the judgement of taste to be an exemplary instance of this consent, a typical illustration of common sense’s obligatory working. However, he also thinks that this common sense ...is a mere ideal norm, and the subjective principle of taste. The elements of the faculty of taste laid out in the Analytic of Beauty, such as ‘disinterestedness’, ‘universal though conceptless pleasure’, ‘purposeless finality’, and ‘necessity’, will be united in it. Lastly, and in seeming contradiction with the above, Kant thinks that our judgements of taste are possible only if a common sense is presupposed, but at the same time this common sense must be understood as merely an effect of the free play of the cognitive faculties. Paradoxical remarks such as these form the intrinsic motivation to the argument of this chapter. How are we to understand the subjectivity of this ‘principle’?

2. Beauty’s ‘Rule’

One of the perspectives Kant presents on the antinomy of taste involves the argument that even though we find that our judgements of taste should be universally agreed upon we do not claim that they are logically necessary. This is illustrated by the fact that we do not think that a criterion amounting to a truth value could be established for these judgements. We cannot find a truth value based on correspondence with a beautiful object’s natural properties, nor one in terms of a coherence with determinate truths unattached to the judgement of taste under consideration. The only rather uncertain way to establish the ‘correctness’ of a judgement of taste is by eliminating those aspects from the experience involved that might cloud the aesthetic relevance of the judgement. Instead of logically necessary, the

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3 Cf. the note in the ‘Remark’ of the deduction of judgements of taste (§ 38, CJ, M147, KU, B151, S221).
4 CJ, M85, KU, B68, S159.
5 CJ, M84, KU, B 67, S159.
6 “Therefore [judgements of taste] must have a subjective principle, and one which determines what pleases or displeases, by means of feeling only and not through concepts, but yet with universal validity. Such a principle, however, could only be regarded as a common sense.” CJ, M82, KU, B 65, S157.
7 “The judgement of taste, therefore, depends upon our presupposing the existence of a common sense. (But this is not to be taken to mean some external sense, but the effect arising from the free play of our powers of cognition).” CJ, M83, KU, B64-65, S157.
8 “It may be a matter of uncertainty whether a person who thinks he is laying down a judgement of taste is, in fact, judging in conformity with that idea; but that this idea is what is contemplated [darauf beziehe] in his judgement, and that, consequently, it is
validity claim of the judgement of taste is exemplary:9 the beautiful object is supposed to be an outstanding instance of a 'rule' that we cannot describe. Now what kind of rule can this be?10 For example, in a botanical encyclopaedia examples of plants are depicted in such a way as to enable us to identify actual plants in nature. A conventional system is at work here: we must understand the ways in which plants differ in general from their representations to remark the resemblances between image and thing. We must reconcile differences in dimensionality, dimension, colour, mobility, et cetera. On top of this, we must be aware of the various ways in which pictures of distinct plants differ from one another. There are, indeed, rules involved in such botanical identifications, and each time we succeed in identifying a plant we will be able to provide to our satisfaction a description of the relevant distinctness. Put differently, such pictures as these comply with the concepts that describe the depicted plants, and they can be understood as aesthetic normal ideas—which Kant took as irrelevant for (the ideal of) beauty, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.

It cannot be this way with a concrete beautiful thing being an exemplary instantiation of a 'rule'. Clearly we do not have encyclopaedic books wherein all exemplary cases of beautiful things are classified. Of course we have books representing the paintings of subsequent ages, periods, styles and painters, but of necessity these books do not assemble all and only aesthetically excellent paintings, nor do they enable their readers to 'cross-categorically' recognize natural beauties or beautiful artefacts of distinct kinds, such as aeroplanes, novels, musical works, sculptures, et cetera. This is due, in the end, to the fact that each criterion of classification will be of a

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9 § 18, CJ, M81, KU, B66-64, S156.
10 § 19. Cf. also § 8, CJ, M56, KU, B26, S131.
general nature and will therefore be irrelevant for the assessment of an individual entity's aesthetic value. Secondly, to advocate the possibility or even desirability of such a general, rule-governed objectivism with regard to individual beauties apparently is a contradiction in terms. All trees of a certain kind have leaves of a certain kind, but they will not all be of equal beauty. Beauty is an aspect of a thing's 'thisness' and not of its general characteristics. Alternatively, we might think of the general meaning, or essence, of the term 'beauty' as residing in some family resemblance. However, this 'family' would comprise the beautiful individuals of each and every kind of perceptual object and we would still be in need of a criterion to establish which instances of a kind fall within the 'family' of beauties and which don't. However, as is the case with a human family where genealogy decides over the relevance of the similarities involved, such a criterion will be external to what seems to be the resemblance relation wanted. So the claim of a family resemblance between beautiful objects merely begs the question. The idea then that beauty is exemplary of some undescribable rule is metaphorical at best—at least if for the sake of the argument we are allowed the idea that there is a literal sense in the first place to the involvement of rules in more straightforward cases of meaning attribution.\footnote{Cf. Boghossian, ‘The Rule-Following Considerations’, 1989 for an elaborate discussion of the rationale of rule-following.} The idea of an undescribable rule needs elaboration.

An important part of this elaboration is that in claiming universal validity we acknowledge that the free play engages more normal cognitive considerations. This is the purport of Kant's statement that judgements of taste are not simply subjective\footnote{“Proofs are of no avail whatever for determining the judgement of taste, and in this connexion matters stand just as they would were that judgement simply subjective.” § 33:1, Cj, M139, KU, B140, S213.} and it might account for the appearance that some rule is implicated in aesthetic matters. However, we are also aware of the insufficiency of these everyday cognitive considerations, and of the relationality of our evaluations with regard to our very own perspective and feelings. Such acknowledgements would then seem to explain why this aesthetic rule is not a real one: we might think that idiosyncrasies in our background knowledge explain our uncertainty with regard to judgements of taste. In effect, however, our judgements of taste do not describe an object's natural properties, so our uncertainty about our evaluative judgement cannot be reduced to the acknowledgement of merely cognitive shortcomings,\footnote{Nor to Goodman's syntactical and semantical 'symptoms' of art's 'languages'.} as Kant argued against the Baumgartian idea of the beauty of sense knowledge.
as being knowledge of a confused kind.\textsuperscript{14} Nor can it be taken away by more knowledgeable approaches. Instead, the uncertainty relates to a different theoretical point which is connected with the role of imagination in the aesthetic experience. I will go into this in Sections 6 and 7, when specifying the regulative and ideal nature of aesthetic experience, and in Chapter 8. First, I will consider the possible relevance that cognitive considerations may be allowed to have within our judgements of beauty.

3. Beauty's Independence from Determinate Concepts

According to Kant the aesthetic judgement is pure if it is not clouded by interests, emotions or concepts, although it may be related to them. Put differently, and concentrating on the role of concepts, purity means that in a judgement of taste no determinate concept may be found at the predicate place. If in specifically different ways a judgement of taste does involve a concept which determines the object, then the judgement is dependent. The aesthetic evaluative predicate itself does not determine its object, as is evident from beauty's lacking a rule of application. Instead, it expresses the pleasure with which the free play of the cognitive faculties manifests itself. Put otherwise, it is this pleasure with which we become aware of this free play, and it is such pleasant awareness that we express with the predicate of 'beauty'. So whenever we attribute beauty, the pleasant awareness of a free play of our cognitive faculties is presupposed. As a consequence every judgement of beauty must be 'pure' in the Kantian sense, whether in it beauty is attributed to a work of art, to some frivolous decoration, or to an artefact complying with some end or other.\textsuperscript{15} Our discussions may concern natural properties of the object, but it should be our own pleasant awareness of our mental activities regarding these properties (among others) which we actually express in the judgement of taste. If we want to prevent this subjectivism from lapsing into idiosyncratic relativism, we must find a way to relate this pleasant awareness to more determinate considerations regarding the object, i.e. to the concepts with which we determine this object.

In his recent Kantian Aesthetics Pursued Anthony Savile argues that the purity of the judgement of taste relates to its justification (determining ground, is what Kant says) not to its content, that is, the question of purity is

\textsuperscript{14} §15:2. CJ, M69, KU, B44-45, S143.

\textsuperscript{15} Such is the import of Kant's remarks on the botanist, who may judge the beauty of a flower in a pure way only by abstracting from his knowledge of biological functionality. (§16:2, CJ, M72, KU, B49, S146).
supposed to be irrelevant to the concepts and terms used to form the proposition with.\textsuperscript{16} According to Savile, on the basis of a judgement of taste certain determinate remarks are made about an object, the truth of which remarks can be ascertained along normal lines. This is irrespective of the fact that the grounds we have for including such determinations must be pure, i.e. they may not be derived from the concepts determining the measure of perfection of the object, nor from sensuous pleasures. Savile’s point of view certainly appears to be an interesting way to look at Kant’s aesthetics, which seems to support some such distinction, albeit not explicitly so, because Kant’s analysis regards the a priori grounds of the judgement of taste exclusively, and not its empirical contents. Nevertheless it is not clear at first glance what the distinction between the terms used and the grounds we ought to have for using them should amount to.\textsuperscript{17} How can we alienate the ‘truth’ of what we say about a beautiful object, from our justification for doing so? Moreover, I am not convinced that the application of terms to an aesthetic object and its properties obeys normal truth-making procedures, as is evident from the fact that aesthetic discourse tends not to be about more normal secondary qualities, such as colours, but about ‘complex properties’, such as ‘tense’, ‘harmonious’, ‘enchanting’, ‘elegant’, et cetera. To apply such predicates as these seems to presuppose more sagacity than ‘mere looking’, and as Kant has it—and Savile acknowledges—does not allow for mechanical tests, or, for that matter, the use of samples and scales. Next, a different perspective on the distinction proposed by Savile will be implied. For now, however, I should like us to look at a different proposal. Ted Cohen argued that in the case of complex works of art (in cinema, for example) every judgement of taste is dependent.\textsuperscript{18} He thinks that the notion

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\textsuperscript{16} Burgess, ‘Kant’s Key to the Critique of Taste’, 1989, p. 492 differentiates between the pleasure's ground and the pleasure's source, along different, less plausible, lines: “...the pleasure's ground is the free play of the cognitive faculties; recognition of this free play as satisfying cognition in general is the pleasure's source.”

\textsuperscript{17} I propose (in Chapter 5, Section 3) a distinction between ‘grand’ aesthetic values, such as beauty and the sublime, and the reasons we are willing to provide in defence of them, only the latter of which are informative—returning with this to the discussion in chapter Two.

\textsuperscript{18} Cohen, ‘An Emendation in Kant’s Theory of Taste’, 1990. Ruth Lorand, ‘Free and Dependent Beauty: a Puzzling Issue’, 1989 has argued against the intelligibility of Kant’s distinction between ‘beauty’ as a genus term, and its two species: free and dependent beauty. If the genus ‘beauty’ is absolutely conceptless, dependent beauty— which supposedly implies some conceptuality— cannot be a species of beauty, whereas if the genus is not supposed to be absolutely devoid of conceptual constraint then a ‘pure’ kind of beauty is not among its species. One cannot have it both ways. Either way the genus collapses or both of its species do. My argument sustains this critique, in that I take Kant’s notion of pure
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of dependent beauty can best be understood as explaining the role played by the concept at the subject position within the relevant proposition stating the judgement of taste, ‘X is beautiful’. With respect to complex works of art, such as those of the cinema, it surely makes a difference if one appreciates a film's plot instead of its editing or lighting qualities. Now, we may all agree that agreement about the concepts with which to describe the object will deepen any critical argument, but why is this the case? Descriptive agreement definitely will not suffice for an actual evaluation, because ‘beauty’ is not derivable from determinations of the object, nor is it itself a determinate concept, as there is no real rule involved in its application, as we have already seen. In order to make Savile’s and Cohen’s remarks fruitful for our approach, we must establish two things: first, we must find out whether such determinate concepts fill in the subject concept in every judgement attributing aesthetic excellence. Secondly, we must explain the role these concepts play within the experience that founds the predicate concept and legitimates the judgement as a whole.

It is well known that Kant took natural beauties to be pure, and not dependent upon concepts with which the ends are determined that are met by the object, among others because, evidently, there are no such concepts. However, in the case of our appreciation of a tree, much the same as with complex works of art, it will surely make a difference if we admire the tree because of its shades of colour rather than because of certain shapes of its bark or of its trunk, et cetera. Some conceptual determination is presupposed here too. Moreover, it appears that without any concepts at all no representation whatsoever will be formed in perception, as—counterfactually—our mind would be confronted with an unsynthesized heap of sense data: at least the categories of understanding will have to be involved and normally also one beauty not to refer to a species of beauty—because no perception could do without concepts—but to the necessary implication of aesthetic experience instead. Cf. also Stecker, ‘Free Beauty, Dependent Beauty, and Art’, 1987; Stecker, ‘Lorand and Kant on Free and Dependent Beauty’, 1990; Lorand, ‘On Free and Dependent Beauty’—A Rejoinder’, 1992; Lord, ‘A Note on Ruth Lorand’s ‘Free and Dependent Beauty: a Puzzling Issue’’, 1991.

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20 According to Savile, op.cit., the notion of dependent beauty functions negatively only: a judgement of taste is precluded when too much weight is placed on the relevant concept and on the object’s measure of perfection with regard to it. I think this position evades the need for an account of the role of the cognitive considerations within the free play.
or more empirical concepts. So our determinate grasp of the natural world has a role to play in the relevant aesthetic experience, and such a grasp evidently embraces specific conceptual determinations. In consequence, determinate concepts are involved in our judgements of natural beauties as they are in our aesthetic judgements of art.

In general then, if we ascribe aesthetic excellence to some particular thing this will be related to the empirical concepts with which we describe the object’s natural properties and relations. The excellence, however, cannot be inferred from these properties or their concepts, nor may it be derived from the involved measure of perfection with regard to that concept or to the goals this concept involves. With regard to this, Kant distinguishes between the internal and the external purposivity of an object, which is preferably (read, exclusively) an artefact. That is, an artefact’s objective purposivity can be measured externally in terms of its fulfilling the ends specified in the concept of the artefact, or internally, in terms of the quantity of properties that subsume it under the concept in question. The concept of an artefact not only specifies the goals the object should answer but also, respectively, specifies what it ought to look like.22 If a judgement is based on any of these two kinds of objective purposivity it will then not be a judgement of taste, but merely a confused kind of judgement of the good.23 It should be based, instead, on our subjective purposivity of the free play of the cognitive faculties. The threat of passing a confused judgement of goodness seems to be absent with regard to natural objects, as there exist no relevant concepts of the goals of natural objects, no external ones at least. In short, instead of such erratic judging we use the notion of aesthetic excellence to express our satisfaction with the way in which in the relevant empirical case our concepts seem to fit the sensory material though not to the measure of providing descriptions of this material, so that someone wanting to argue for some object’s aesthetic excellence should ultimately base his remarks on his own satisfaction regarding a specific kind of experience of the applicability of his background knowledge to the relevant object. The concepts making up the judgement’s dependence somehow determine the subject matter of the experience which makes up its purity. However, aesthetic excellence’s relation with the concepts involved can and, I think, should be analyzed with the help of Kant’s transcendental

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22 Which nowadays is understood in terms of an object’s functional or, respectively, procedural definition. Cf. Davies, Definitions of Art, Chapter 2. In normal circumstances these two aspects of a concept’s definition should correspond with each other.

notion of a free play of the cognitive faculties. So let us consider this in more detail.

4. The Free Play’s Ambiguous Role

According to Kant our aesthetic acknowledgement of the common sense is a consequence of the subjective finality of the free play of the cognitive faculties, of which we become aware by our reflective feeling of pleasure.\textsuperscript{24} Within this free play the understanding is repeatedly challenged by the imagination\textsuperscript{25} to provide the concepts which imagination keeps challenging. One might therefore characterize this free play of the cognitive faculties as a dialogue, rather than a harmony, between understanding, which at the request of imagination furnishes certain determinate concepts, and the imagination, which keeps disobeying these concepts’ application by providing “a wealth of undeveloped material”.\textsuperscript{26} This notion of the ‘free play of the cognitive faculties’ performs an ambiguous role though. One can easily see it as a description of the beholder’s response to the beautiful object under consideration, but this would make the free play into an empirical event, not one grounding a priori the judgement of taste. However, Kant sometimes takes the emotion resulting from the free play as decisive, and not the empirical mental activities that this emotion is about, and understands this emotion as non-representative: that is, as transcendental, not empirical. If the empirical activity (or attitude) rather than only being necessary for a judgement of taste were instead sufficient for it, then undertaking it would be the same as perceiving beauty. And indeed nothing stands in the way of the idea that from some empirical point of view the free play indeed is a set of mental events that can be engaged in actively: we can actively decide not to let the (empirical) concepts of the understanding determine the sensuous manifold, but have the imagination instead propose all kinds of new perspectives on some specific object, whether these imaginative perspectives are kindred or not to the concepts we might more normally, i.e. in a cognitive experience, want to apply. This may be harder to do in the case of a

\textsuperscript{24} ... the pleasure or subjective finality ... CJ, M147, KU, B 151, S221.
\textsuperscript{25} According to Kant “Imagination is the faculty of representing an object even without its presence in intuition.” Critique of Pure Reason, Henceforth: CPR: §24:3, B151.
\textsuperscript{26} Kant formulates this dialogue as follows: “aesthetically [the imagination] is free to furnish of its own accord, over and above that agreement with the concept, a wealth of undeveloped material for the understanding, to which the latter paid no regard in its concept, but which it [i.e., the understanding] can make use of, not so much objectively for cognition, as subjectively for quickening the cognitive faculties, and hence also indirectly for cognitions...” §49:10. CJ, M, KU, B198, S253.
natural object or an artefact, neither of which is intended for aesthetic contemplation, but even in such cases it should not be impossible.\textsuperscript{27} Perhaps such an actively undertaken set of mental activities is the way to correctly ‘perceive’ aesthetic properties, i.e. we may perceive aesthetic properties such as those referred to by Frank Sibley, not by conceptually determined perception, but solely by way of an imaginative free play. Ontologically speaking it may strike one as funny that the relationship between the mind’s activities and aesthetic properties should be tighter than is the case with so-called secondary qualities, like colours, even though these latter kinds of properties cannot be conceived of without reference to the beholder’s mental states.\textsuperscript{28} We are pretty certain that ‘looking for colours’ does not determine one’s seeing a specific colour, say, red. ‘To watch’ normally does not coincide with ‘to see’. We seem far less reluctant, however, to accept the idea that enacting a free play of the cognitive faculties indeed induces one to see beauty. Looking in a certain way at some object or other may cause the object’s beauty to come forward. This is due, among other things, to the fact that aesthetic properties are not merely subject-dependent (as are secondary qualities) but are thoroughly subjective in that they depend on the subject’s imagination on top of his or her receptivity. In this chapter, I shall look into Kant’s answer to this conceptual specificity of aesthetic properties (as distinguished from secondary quality terms); in Chapter 7 I shall return to it, and take more contemporary studies as the reference point.

To begin with, we have more than one reason for not being prone to draw the conclusion that actively undertaking a free play amounts to perceiving beauty. Firstly, because we believe that doing our best does not warrant positive aesthetic evaluation; we want to uphold the more or less realist idea of a thing’s deserving our judgement of taste. Secondly, and perhaps less obvious, the idea that perceptive agency could secure a positive aesthetic evaluation presupposes that beauty, or its cognates, merely is a natural property with regard to which there would have to be rules governing its correct discernment. Kant denies that such rules exist in the first place, but even if they did it would be evident that at least most of us do not have access to them. Therefore, if the free play of the cognitive faculties is to perform its special role, some of its aspects other than mere agency must be what makes us decide to be confronted with a beautiful object. This ambiguity between

\textsuperscript{27} This is part of the argument sustaining Kant’s seeming preference for natural over artistic beauty.

active and decisive aspects of a singularly described mental event must be
resolved if we are to develop an adequate theory of aesthetic evaluation.
However, in Kant’s aesthetics the ambiguity seems to stem from Kant’s
distinction between transcendental idealism and empirical realism: the free
play is empirically real but its legitimizing role is transcendentally ideal.
Unfortunately, I cannot go further into the more general distinction here, but
propose instead a—temporary—way out through Kant’s treatment of the
aesthetic pleasure involved.

According to Kant the faculty of judgement in the aesthetic mode of
estimating functions in order “… to [feel] with pleasure the subjective bear-
ings of the representation.”29 Apparently Kant thinks that it is “The feeling of
pleasure or displeasure [which] denotes nothing in the object…” which
makes the notion of the free play of the cognitive faculties function deci-
sively.30 The pleasure regarding these subjective bearings of the
representation, i.e., the free play of the cognitive faculties, must then be taken
as the awareness that settles our aesthetic judgement. Now, this pleasure is
not an intentional activity, but a specific awareness of one, a specific way of
being affected by sensation, imagination and understanding.31 Kant’s
definition of 'pleasure', in § 10, is of great interest here, since it is nominal
and does not describe an allegedly substantial, empirical, experience of some
clearly circumscribed emotion:

“The consciousness of the causality of a representation in respect of the state of
the Subject as one tending to preserve a continuance of that state, may here be said
to denote in a general way what is called pleasure.”32

‘Pleasure’ then should be taken as an adverbial determination of the relevant
awareness of the free play of the cognitive faculties.33 So it is not the

29 CJ, M150, KU, B155, S224.
30 More than once Kant asserts this Humean view of ‘feeling’ being non-
representative. Cf. CJ, M42, M63, M145.
31 According to Kant sensation is mere receptivity, i.e. the senses form a faculty of
obtaining representations by being affected (CPR, B33). Cf. also Kant: Anthropologie in
pragmatischer Hinsicht. Leipzig: Meiner, 1922, § 24, IV 57. Perception merely finds some
succession within these inner affections schematized by inner sense with categories.
(CPR, § 24.) Such self-affection is the a priori act by way of which the understanding
comes to grips with a world consisting of spatio-temporally ordered objects and events.
Inner sense as such is the mind’s receptivity, the transcendental ‘spot’ where sensuous
data meet with transcendental and determinate concepts.
32 CJ, M61, KU, B33, S135.
33 “The consciousness of mere formal finality in the play of the cognitive faculties of
the Subject attending a representation whereby an object is given, is the pleasure itself ...
” CJ, § 12, M64, KU, B36-37, S137-38.
empirical perceptual and imaginative activities concerning the object but rather the pleasant awareness of such free activities, that constitutes our judgement of taste. For a judgement of taste, therefore, the subjective feeling of pleasure or displeasure is the very manner in which our inner sense ‘correctly’ receives an object’s aesthetic excellence. We merely recognize it by wanting to carry on with the free play involved. Let us therefore conclude that Kant has provided the free play of the cognitive faculties with the double function of empirically providing the judgement of taste with its contents (the subject concept, the reasons we are willing to provide for our judgement), and of transcendentally grounding it (the predicate concept).

5. Everyday Sound Understanding

Let me summarize some of the conclusions reached so far with regard to the question of how Kant thinks we legitimize our discourse on aesthetic excellence. Firstly, for the sake of its purity, the cognitive considerations within a judgement of taste need a subjective supplement: no testimony of either natural properties or of aesthetic qualities (if these—counterfactually—were testifiable in the first place) suffices. Secondly, this subjective supplement comes down to the pleasant awareness of the common sense involved in the free dialogue between our cognitive faculties. This common sense Kant describes in the following way:

“... the proportion of these cognitive faculties which is requisite for taste is requisite also for ordinary sound understanding, the presence of which we are entitled to presuppose in every one.”

Now, because we presuppose a common sense, i.e. a communicability, in our everyday communication, it may seem that we take its existence for granted. However, the very fact that it ‘takes us by pleasure’ in aesthetic experience indicates that we do not.

34 It is with this conviction that Kant has started CJ: “If we wish to discern whether anything is beautiful or not, we do not refer the representation of it to the Object by means of understanding with a view to cognition, but by means of the imagination (acting perhaps in conjunction with understanding) we refer the representation to the Subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure.” § 1, CJ, M41, KU, B3, S115.

35 Taking either of these functions as the sole principle of taste reduces aesthetics to either an empiricism, or, respectively, a rationalism. Instead, one should account for both functions and their relatedness, because ... “The first would obliterate the distinction that marks off the object of our delight from the agreeable; the second, supposing the judgement rested upon determinate concepts, would obliterate its distinction from the good.” CJ, §58:1, M215, KU B246, S289.

36 CJ, M150, KU, B155, S224.
Let us start from the beginning of the argument, though. In section 40 Kant distinguishes common sense from ordinary sound understanding considering the latter ‘vulgar’. The former, on the contrary, he takes as an a priori taking into account of the ‘collective reason of mankind’.\(^{37}\) But what does this mean exactly? Surely everyday sound understanding has its proper relevance for such a collective reason; it will be mostly on the basis of everyday sound understanding, if at all, that we realize universal communicability. There is, of course, one way not to use sound understanding in aesthetic argument: we cannot justify a judgement of taste by referring to ‘what the people think’. This would be less appropriate even than trying to formulate a standard of taste on the basis of many good judgements uttered by many suitably equipped critics, because in this latter case the results would not be as arbitrary (albeit just as inconclusive) as they would be in reference to what the majority thinks, irrespective of their exact powers and faculties of judgement. Nevertheless, we have seen above how all judgements of taste, pure though they may be, also depend on certain cognitive considerations. Moreover, within aesthetic experience our faculties are co-operating as they would in any cognitive activity.\(^{38}\) And although it is not understanding but imagination which takes the lead here,\(^{39}\) understanding is involved. Moreover, Kant surely does not mean with what we have constructed as his remarks on the permissibility of conceptual determination at the subject place in our aesthetic judgements, that this only regards scientific knowledge, at the expense of everyday, vulgar considerations. So we may safely conclude that everyday sound understanding will have something to contribute to the determination of the valued object and will thus form part of what the aesthetic judgement is all about. What is expressed in an aesthetic judgement is the pleasure regarding the communicability of our everyday understanding of the object, and not merely of the more specialist understanding provided by critics and experts. Beauty is for everyone—irrespective of the possibility of there being judgements more relevant to some specific object, such as those more normally provided by suitably equipped critics.

\(^{37}\) “… the idea of a public sense, i.e. a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of every one else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind …” CJ, M151, KU, B157, S225.

\(^{38}\) Cf. CJ, § 3, M45, KU, B8-9, 118.

Kant also describes the aesthetic feeling of pleasure or displeasure, i.e. our awareness of the common sense, as a feeling of life:

"Here the representation is referred wholly to the Subject, and what is more to its feeling of life—under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure..."\(^{40}\)

If this specification is to help explain the judgement of taste, then the notion of the feeling of life should not refer to some vague and speculative principle of personal identity. Instead it should involve certain concrete, though fundamental, feelings that may serve as an evaluative, internal criterion of the process that ‘a life’ comprises, in much the following way: whenever the feeling of life (feeling of “pleasure or displeasure”) is enhanced, be it positively or negatively, there are possibilities at stake: alternatives to some actual situation. If the feeling of life is positively enhanced then something is to be celebrated (and to be continued). If we are allowed the idea that this feeling’s enhancement relates to possibilities, then such a celebration will necessarily also regard the acknowledgement that the situation as experienced is not nearly as inevitable as it might have seemed before, but is nevertheless of such nature as to have one want it continued. The feeling of life thus also becomes the criterion with which imagination works in its schematic synthesis of the manifold of the senses, and in its guiding role in the free play. Returning to our subject matter then, aesthetic judgements express not only our awareness of the communicability of our cognitive considerations, but also the fact that there is no metaphysical necessity to this communicability. We must understand aesthetic pleasure, then, as a reflective assessment by our feeling of life, of the contingency of the common sense that is involved in our (everyday) determinations of the world and the objects and events inhering in it.

6. An Ideal Aesthetic Experience

How are we to understand this transcendental assessment: can it be upheld against contemporary scepticism such as that expressed by Nelson

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\(^{40}\) CJ, M42, KU, B3, S115. [My italics].
Goodman? Goodman surely is right in supposing that within an aesthetic argument we are interested in information about the object more than in some uninformative idiosyncratic evaluation.\(^{41}\) And we can state an everyday corollary to this: we let ourselves be convinced by arguments and descriptions of the object; we do communicate about aesthetic values as if they were natural properties; moreover, we hardly ever have aesthetic experiences of the kind that would correspond to the Kantian analysis, let alone actually ever refer to them. Therefore, it is no coincidence that a theoretical definition of empirical aesthetic experiences is not available. Monroe Beardsley, for example, has found only a set of necessary conditions, and has argued that we are unable to state the conditions that are also sufficient for such a definition. So we may in the end be tempted to dismiss altogether the claims involved and the notion of aesthetic experience, as Goodman does. However, we think something is wrong with the elitist person judging aesthetic matters from a purely social point of view, and citing other people’s appraisals rather than ‘looking for himself.’ We adhere to the principle of acquaintance.\(^{42}\) We are in need of an account of evaluations’ normative effect, rather than of their descriptive efficacy and, indeed, Kant has something to say about this normativity. Starting then from the idea of evaluation’s normative effect, we may as well conclude from the above sceptical remarks about empirical experiences that in arguing about matters of taste, although we refer to actual experiences, we do not mean these to be decisive.

So far I have attributed to Kant the view that the relevant aesthetic pleasure concerns our common sense and the contingency of its presupposition. The lack of a provable, physical necessity of the values that are ascertained in an aesthetic evaluation, is what makes the awareness pleasant in the first place. As argued above, aesthetic experience concerns the surprise involved in our awareness of the actual, and contingent, co-operation of our cognitive faculties with regard to some specific part of the world. Perhaps then we may conceive of aesthetic excellence as providing an experiential awareness of this problem is a big task that we assign to aesthetic experience in aesthetic discourse; Indeed too big, it

\(^{41}\) Goodman, LA, chapter VI, p. 261: “To say that a work of art is good or even to say how good it is does not after all provide much information, does not tell us whether the work is evocative, robust, vibrant, or exquisitely designed, and still less what are its salient specific qualities of color, shape, or sound.”

\(^{42}\) As Kant formulates it: “We want to get a look at the object with our own eyes, just as if our delight depended on sensation.” §8:6, CJ M56, KU, B25, S130.
seems, for any concrete empirical experience to meet. (It may be too vague as well for any experience not to meet it.) This is why we think of it as overcoming us if we are lucky enough; and why we think that, notwithstanding the trouble we go through in our perceptual contemplation, we cannot simply wring it from such contemplative activity, even though at some point missing a particular work of art’s aesthetic excellence may be due to a lack of concentration by the beholder. Nevertheless we do readily refer to and believe in the notion of an aesthetic appreciative experience which secures our attribution of aesthetic values such as aesthetic excellence, artistic creativity, style, and aesthetic authenticity. We talk along lines which ultimately point to some specific experience, and if we want to understand such referring, a better strategy than denying our actual experiences’ empirical identity and relevance would lie in understanding the functionality of such reference as involving some ideal notion of this experience.

7. A regulative Principle of Aesthetic Discourse

In keeping with the distinction that Kant proposes in the Preface to the first edition of Critique of Judgement, in the context of the aesthetic problem we should now ask whether this ideal notion of a pleasant, aesthetic, awareness of the contingency of a presupposed common sense should be regarded as constitutive or regulative for our notion of aesthetic excellence.\(^43\) In his analysis of the ‘analogies of experience’ in Critique of Pure Reason Kant accounts for the difference between ‘constitutive’ and ‘regulative’ with the help of a distinction between mathematical and philosophical analogies: a mathematical analogy enables us to know a fourth member if one knows three already, whereas in a philosophical analogy only some rule of recognition is implied, and an ability to recognize the next instance if it should occur, but not the possibility to infer this next instance.\(^44\) In this sense, philosophical analogies are not constitutive, but regulative. Also, if a discursive domain is being constituted by some unique a priori principle it shall be independent from other domains.

To start with the latter point: the alleged autonomy of our discourse on aesthetic excellence is merely relative, because it does not imply such independence: the aesthetic domain is connected with our knowledge claims as it is with our actions, however problematically so. The notion of the pleas-
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ant awareness of common sense which forms the principle—with its
undescribable rule—of aesthetic discourse therefore cannot be constitutive.

This we could also have derived from the fact that we cannot prove a thing's
beauty on the ground of such an awareness nor on the ground of an
anologue with three acknowledgedly beautiful things. So on both counts the
principle of aesthetic discourse must be regulative. And because this
principle—the pleasant awareness of a common sense—rests upon the idea of
an identifiable aesthetic experience, for aesthetic discourse aesthetic
experience itself functions as the regulative principle.

The empirically indistinct character of aesthetic experiences with regard
to their functionality can, in combination with the regulative functionality of
its notion, be accounted for by taking the aesthetic experience as functioning
within aesthetic discourse as an ‘asymptotic’ ideality, rather than as an
identifiable, and substantial, empirical event. But why should this ideal
experience be relevant for our everyday, i.e. empirical, critical practice? This
question may prove far less intelligible than it may seem at first sight,
because we are not sure what empirical activities should be undertaken in
order to recognize an aesthetic value, nor are we certain that they are the
kind of things that are there simply to be recognized. Kant has made it clear
that as empirical events aesthetic experiences are indecisive. On the one
hand, the ideal aesthetic experience may be an actuality for some of us at
some specific time, but even then no determinate claims as to this actuality
will provide a knock-down argument for a specific evaluation, nor will they
deepest the relevant issue. We will not be convinced of a thing's beauty by a
statement such as: “Believe me, I had this aesthetic experience when
contemplating this object, so it must be beautiful.” Moreover, no empirical
identification of aesthetic experiences is ever going to be operable, as the
symptoms of aesthetic experience reveal an obvious vagueness.45 We saw
above that this is not accidental. Instead it provides more evidence of its
merely regulative nature. As such the aesthetic experience is an ideality, and
may just as well, without loss of regulative functionality, be a figment of our
(theoretical) imagination. On the other hand, this aesthetic experience is an
idealization in that we ascribe comprehensiveness, and coherence to it, and
take it to include many important realizations related to common sense, and

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Experience’, 1983, p. 89. The remark at least regards attempts of providing a description
of aesthetic experiences independent of their objects. If instead one would try to relate the
experience in non-contingent manner to objective qualities much of this vagueness might
recede. However, since objective properties cannot be taken as decisive, such a strategy
does not seem available here.
to possess a moral significance that possibly can only be explained in terms of some ideal way of life. That leaves us with the question why aesthetic excellence would bring in the moral significance that Kant attributes to it.\footnote{This chapter rehearses the arguments in my paper, Gerwen, ‘Kant’s Regulative Principle of Aesthetic Excellence: The Ideal Aesthetic Experience’, 1995. A draft of this paper was presented at the Annual conference of the British Society of Aesthetics, September, 1993. I have profited considerably from critical remarks by Paul Crowther, Nicholas MacAdoo, Anthony Savile, Jan Bransen, Marc Slors, and Menno Lievers, Professors Karl Schuhmann, Willem van Reijen, Pat Matthews, John Neubauer, Rudolf Makkreel, and an anonymous referee for Kant-Studien. I am grateful to the editors of Kant-Studien for allowing me to use this paper here.}