

On Aesthetic Judgments and Contemplative Perception in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

HEMMO LAIHO*

University of Turku, Finland

Abstract

The paper argues that much of Kant's largely formalistic account of aesthetic appreciation stands on the idea that the judger is able to engage with the object of her judgment purely sensibly and hence non-conceptually or non-cognitively. This is to say that the judger must be able to ground her judgment on the immediate sensory affection by the object (which makes her judgment an aesthetic judgment of sense) or on the object's sensible form (which makes her judgment an aesthetic judgment of taste). The paper also argues that these two purely sensible grounds, accessible in the aesthetic examination of objects, underlie the feeling involved in such judgments. In broader terms, the paper outlines how Kant's account of aesthetic judgment suggests what might be called a contemplative model of perception.

Key words

Aesthetic Judgment; Contemplation; Form; Intuition; Sensation

1. Introduction

I argue, in what follows, that much of Kant's account of aesthetic appreciation, as presented in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in particular, stands on the idea that the judger is able to engage with the object of her judgment purely sensibly and hence non-conceptually or, as one might also want to put it, non-cognitively (*pace* e.g. Janaway

* Department of Philosophy, University of Turku, Finland, e-mail heanla@utu.fi

1997). Put differently, I want to underline that for Kant the possibility of certain kinds of judgments depends on purely sensuous or formalistic outlook on things, and that such an outlook implies conceptually unmediated sensible content. By such content Kant means, roughly, the way a thing looks or sounds, or is represented to look or sound, which can be understood either as a representation of the immediate sensory affection by the thing or its sensible structure, composition or form (*Gestalt, Form*).

In aesthetics, such a position implies formalism. That said, I suspect that Kant's complex theory in the third *Critique* completely fits formalism or any other common label or "ism". Formalism nevertheless has its place in aesthetic evaluation, at least in certain contexts, and I think this is also true of Kant (see e.g. Zangwill 2001). Instead of arguing for a formalist interpretation of Kant, however, my goal in what follows is to examine some of the basic tenets of Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment, and while some of these tenets do support a formalist reading of Kant's aesthetics, they are perhaps more illustrative of Kant's views on perception underlying his aesthetic theory more generally. Relatedly, I will speak about aesthetic appreciation in two senses: as a matter of palate and the like, or "the taste of the senses" (*KU*, 5:214), on the one hand, and as a matter of taste in the 18th century sense of the term, or "the taste of reflection" (*ibid.*), on the other. Kant's formalist tendencies have to do with the latter, but the former is, I think, equally illustrative of Kant's overall position.

I begin, in §2, by examining the ground of aesthetic judgment, which can be understood in two ways, namely either as a feeling or as that which prompts the feeling. The latter kind of ground can be either a mere sensation (which makes the judgment an aesthetic judgment of sense) or intuition (which, at least ideally, makes the judgment a pure aesthetic judgment of taste). In §3, I examine what it means to engage with objects merely sensibly, as suggested by both kinds of aesthetic judgment. In §4, I show how such a stance on objects not only suggests what I call a contemplative model of perception but finds further support from Kant's views on contemplation and aesthetic reflection. In the concluding remarks, I consider briefly how the contemplative model of perception, as suggested by the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, might connect with Kant's theory of cognition as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

2. Grounds of Aesthetic Judgments

Kant famously lays out his account of aesthetic judgement in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Many things Kant says in that book suggests that Kant's view on aesthetic appreciation of nature and art can be considered to be more or less formalistic. One of the things that points to this direction is the idea that the cognitive subject must be able to represent the object of her aesthetic judgment without basing her representation on concepts in order to get the required kind of satisfaction out of the object in question (see e.g. *KU*, 5:219). A more explicitly formalistic demand is that "beauty [...] should properly concern mere form" (Kant 2000b, p. 108; *KU*, 5:223).

Many commentators have been puzzled about these requirements. If, for example, the non-conceptuality of aesthetic judgment is taken to mean that in order to make aesthetic judgments we must abandon all our conceptual understanding of the things we make judgments about, then Kant's position may indeed appear as absurd (e.g. Cohen 2002, p. 2). One might want to add to this that here we are speaking of judgments, and one of the core features of Kant's theory of cognition is that the human thinker is more than anything a maker of judgments the constituents of which are concepts or other judgments (A69/B94; B141). It might therefore be considered trivially true that all kinds of judgments are in some sense conceptual and trivially false that judgments could be made without the application of concepts, or the faculty of concepts also known as understanding, for that matter.¹ In a similar vein, the "mere form" requirement may suggest some kind of "empty cognitive stock" on the part of the judge, which some commentators find utterly implausible (see e.g. Janaway 1997, pp. 459-460; Wollheim 1980, p. 33 and *passim*).

Still, there are reasons to attribute the idea of non-conceptual engagement with objects to Kant without confusing him for Schopenhauer, for example (*pace* Janaway 1997, 461-463).² The first thing to acknowledge is that the idea of the non-conceptuality of aesthetic judgment ultimately concerns the *ground* of judgment (or so I wish to argue). By the ground of aesthetic judgment Kant sometimes means feeling (e.g. *KU*, 231). Accordingly, any such judgment has to do with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, understood either as a particular feeling or the faculty responsible for feelings (see e.g. *EEKU*, 20:224; *KU*, 5:196). And for Kant feelings are non-cognitive states that concern objects' influence on us rather than objects as such (see e.g. *V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1009).

This, however, is not the end of story. To identify the ground of aesthetic judgment straightforwardly with (dis)pleasurable feeling and leave it at that would be to overlook another crucial point about the ground of aesthetic judgment (cf. e.g. Janaway 1997). The further thing to acknowledge is that which enables the feeling. As Kant repeatedly suggests, although he is not always explicit about it, this feeling-enabler is that which is sensibly present to the judge, namely the "representation through which the object is given (not through which it is thought)" (Kant 2000b, p. 115; *KU*, 5:230). By such a representation, Kant must mean what he calls intuition (*Anschauung*). Kant also speaks of the "form of the purposiveness of an object" as the ground of the judgment of taste (Kant 2000b, p. 106; *KU*, 5:221). As I read this phrase, Kant means, basically, the object's spatial form or structure, although the phrase also contains the further idea that aesthetically praiseworthy objects arouse a peculiar kind of sense of purposiveness as we examine them (I will return to both of these topics below).

¹ Kant himself reminds his reader about this by adding in a footnote that "a relation to the understanding is always contained even in the judgment of taste" (Kant 2000b, p. 89n; *KU*, 5:203*).

² Janaway thinks that 'wholly non-conceptual engagement' fits Schopenhauer's view but not Kant's (Janaway 1997, pp. 471-472). For Schopenhauer's view on ordinary perception versus aesthetic perception, see Vandenabeele 2015, pp. 33-49.

For now, the most important thing to acknowledge is that the feeling is but a consequence or effect (see also A29/B44) of a certain kind of response allowed by (a certain kind of examination that targets) the object as it is given to us. In other words, the touchstone of aesthetic judgment is not just feeling as such, but a specific manner of representation of the object on which the feeling itself is grounded. Here there are two alternatives: either the feeling is grounded on *sense-sensation* or the feeling is grounded on *sense-intuition*, as the distinction is put in the 1794-95 lectures on metaphysics, where Kant briefly explains his aesthetic theory as well (Kant 2001, p. 479; *V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1009-1010).

The distinction between sense-sensation and sense-intuition maps quite neatly onto Kant's distinction between two kinds of aesthetic judgment. As far as Kant's theory of judgment in general is concerned, the central new thing in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is of course the distinction between determining and reflecting judgment. Undoubtedly, the most discussed variant of reflecting judgment is the judgment of taste, a special kind of subjectively yet universally valid judgment concerning the beautiful—e.g. “This rose is beautiful.” As everybody familiar with the third *Critique* knows, such a judgment is also known as reflecting aesthetic judgment in distinction to reflecting teleological judgment. However, even though it is not uncommon in the literature to identify aesthetic judgment with the reflecting variety (see e.g. Kukla 2006, p. 6n10; Pillow 2006, p. 255; Longuenesse 2000, pp. 168-169n4), there is also non-reflecting aesthetic judgment, namely the aesthetic judgment of sense—e.g. “This wine tastes nice.” As opposed to reflecting aesthetic judgments, non-reflecting aesthetic judgments are supposed to express merely a private viewpoint on objects, which need not be anything more than an expression of personal (dis)liking or “agreeableness”.

Most importantly for the present purposes, aesthetic judgments of sense—or judgments of sensation, as Kant at one point calls them (*KU*, 5:288)—are ultimately based on sensation, understood as the *matter* of perception (A167/B209). By contrast, the possibility of the judgment of taste, although necessarily feeling-bound, ultimately stems from the object's *form* (*Gestalt, Form*). This also means that such a judgment depends on intuition (see also *V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1010)—i.e. the kind of representation or operation of the mind that gives us spatiotemporally structured somethings with their distinctive *Gestalten*.³

³ This is not to say that aesthetic judgments of sense or sensation would not depend on intuition too. On the contrary, sensations being the material components of empirical intuitions (see also e.g. *Anth*, 7:143*), not only are sensations parts of representations of objects, but they can only be delivered (so to speak) through intuition. Insofar as the distinction between the two kinds of aesthetic judgments is concerned—especially since Kant sometimes seems to identify sensation with feeling—the crucial thing to my mind is that sensations proper prompt the feeling of (dis)pleasure expressed in an aesthetic judgment of sense but are not identical with the feeling. As Kant explains in the *First Introduction*: “Thus an aesthetic judgment is that whose determining ground lies in a sensation that is immediately connected with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. In the aesthetic judgment of sense it is that sensation which is immediately produced by the empirical intuition of the object” (Kant 2000b, p. 26; *EEKU*, 20:224). On the further issue of whether sensations as such are representational or not, see esp. Jankowiak 2014.

Unsurprisingly, then, Kant calls aesthetic judgments of sense material aesthetic judgments in distinction to formal aesthetic judgments also known as judgments of taste (*KU*, 5:223; see also *EEKU*, 20:224). As will be elaborated in what follows, in the case of formal aesthetic judgment, the pleasurable mental state required for a successful judgment can only arise from attending the form of the object, not from thinking it under some concept. In a similar vein, to make a material aesthetic judgment, you must base your judgment on sensations—i.e. “the matter of the representations” (Kant 2000b, p. 108; *KU*, 5:224)—produced by the object (as it affects your palate, for example), not on what you happen to know about it. Indeed, it must be this non-cognitive or non-conceptual stance towards objects from which Kant’s theoretical need to distinguish between “merely” aesthetic judgments (see e.g. *EEKU*, 20:223) and knowledge-aiming, cognitively determining judgments originates.

3. Attending to the Given

The non-cognitive dimension of aesthetic judgments alluded to in the previous section does not need to mean that such judgments, as judgments, are purely sensuous. On the contrary, it should be clear that we cannot make and utter the judgment “This rose is beautiful” without being perfectly aware that we are examining a rose, and this requires concept-application like any judgment. In the same vein, it would be odd to insist that making a certain kind of judgment about a particular rose would require that we abandon all our knowledge and beliefs about roses.

Accordingly, the kind of contemplative perception suggested by Kant in his aesthetic theory most likely does not mean that the overall cognitive state of the subject must be totally concept-free at a certain moment. It sounds more plausible that the subject, while possibly perfectly understanding that she is looking at a rose, succeeds in also regarding the object only according to those features that are not concept-bound. Kant himself alludes to such a situation in his lectures, when he tells his students how the existence of a house may pain him on grounds presented by his understanding—presumably, because of what he knows about its past—yet continue to please him as far its form is concerned (*V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1009-1010).

What I take to be crucial is that the judger ought to ground her judgment on the sensation itself, if the judgment is supposed to be a material aesthetic judgment. Similarly, the judger ought to ground her judgment on mere intuition, i.e. the kind of representation that provides the form, if the judgment is supposed to be a formal aesthetic judgment, as it appears to be the case in Kant’s example. Otherwise, the judgment is either not aesthetic at all or the judgment is not a pure and free aesthetic judgment, i.e. it might still be a judgment of adherent or relative beauty (*KU*, 5:229-230) or “a partly intellectualized judgment of taste” (Kant 2000b, p. 117; *KU*, 5:232-233). Similarly, if an aesthetic judgment is mixed with interest, it is not pure but partial (*KU*, 5: 205).

The main point is that the judger could not make fully-fledged aesthetic judgments unless she had access to purely sensible grounds. In other words, in order to make material aesthetic judgments, the judging subject must be able to attend to tastes, smells, colors, sounds and textures, and perhaps also joys and sorrows and the like, insofar (and only insofar) as these are sensed or felt. For example, the manner a specific red color looks like, or the taste of coffee (and its taste alone), could serve as proper grounds of such judgments. An actual material aesthetic judgment thus is, basically, both an indication of how something tastes to me, for example, and an indication of the fact that my attending to this particular sensation caused by certain object comes with pleasure or displeasure (see also e.g. *V-Met-L2/Pölit*, 28:586). In a similar vein, for formal aesthetic judgments to be possible, the judger must be able to attend to the object's *Gestalt* and ground her judgment on this and only this. For example, the spatial constitution of the house (see *V-Met/Mron*, 29:1009) could serve as such a ground of judgment insofar as the object is considered merely formally yet sensibly, that is, without basing the judgment on the material features provided through sensation or features attributed to the object when thinking it under some concept or the other.

Such material or formal yet merely sensible features of objects should be strictly distinguished from features such as size or length, understood as measures based on some unit. Indeed, merely sensible features of objects should be kept apart from any such properties attributed to the object through which we come to understand what *kind* of an object it is—including, in particular, what *purpose* the object might serve (e.g. *KU*, 5:221, 226-227).⁴ Certainly, concepts are necessary for understanding and experiencing objects this way—ultimately, you would need both the categories and empirical concepts for that. For example, when you think of the rose as a certain kind of organic complex that has this or that feature, you employ at least the categories of Plurality and *substantia et accidens*, but also the empirical concepts of rose and plant.

It is, however, equally crucial to distinguish features accessed via sense-sensation and sense-intuition from any such features determined through concepts. In particular, it does not seem to be the case that, for Kant, the categories or empirical concepts would have anything to do with the exact way things look, sound, taste, feel or smell purely sensibly speaking—in their empirical uniqueness, as it were. Indeed, not only are the categories a class of a priori concepts, but apparently all concepts for Kant are representations that “[contain] only the common characteristic (leaving out what is particular)” (Kant 2000b, p. 345; *KU*, 5:484). By contrast, for you to make an aesthetic judgment you will have to base your judgment on the particular or otherwise your judgment is ruined.

There are many ways to ruin an aesthetic judgment. To try and base your judgment on pre-established rules, to base your judgment on testimony, to base your judgment on generalizations, or more generally and more closely to the point just made, to base your

⁴ Again, the non-pure judgments of taste, which “presuppose [...] the concept of what the object ought to be” (Kant 2000b, p. 114; *KU*, 5:229) would be an exception.

judgment on concepts are all ways to ruin a judgment if the judgment is supposed to be truly an aesthetic judgment (*KU*, 5:215-216, 231-232, 285-286). As far as the judgment of taste is concerned, to be interested in the existence of the object (i.e. to desire it) would be a yet another way to ruin the judgment (see e.g. *KU*, 5:209). Indeed, the disinterestedness criterion—according to which you must attend to the object for its own sake—might just as well be the most central feature of Kant’s theory of aesthetic evaluation. I do not think that the notion of disinterestedness is crucial for understanding the more general idea behind Kant’s account of aesthetic judgment and contemplative model of perception, however.

More crucially for our purposes, as Kant writes when he explains that judgments of taste are independent of perfection as well, basing an aesthetic judgment on concepts is simply something we cannot do, because

if one were to call confused concepts and the objective judgment that is grounded in them aesthetic, one would have an understanding that judged by sense or a sense that represented its object through concepts, both of which are self-contradictory. (Kant 2000b, p. 113, *KU*, 5:228)

Here, Kant partly reiterates one of the basic points of his view about the human mind, according to which the faculties of understanding and sensibility are separate capacities whose cognitive functions and contributions are unexchangeable and irreducible to one another (see e.g. A51-52/B75-77). At the same time, it seems that he also wants to make a very simple point, which is that the very notion of aesthetic judgment would be a misnomer if it would require as its ground something that cannot really be sensible (*sinnlich, ästhetisch*) in the end. In the quote, “confused concepts” are such a thing: even if confused or lacking in clarity and distinctness, they are nevertheless concepts, not sensible representations.

To put it differently, the ground of aesthetic judgment must be something that is left out from the conceptual determination of the object, and the maker of an aesthetic judgment about the object must pay attention to just this something, which Kant identifies with a feeling, on the one hand, and the way the object shows itself to the senses, on the other. For Kant, taste in particular requires the capacity to abstract from conceptual determination, or as he explicates his position using an expert’s knowledge of plants as an example,

even the botanist, who recognizes in [the flower] the reproductive organ of the plant pays no attention to this natural end if he judges the flower by means of taste. (Kant 2000b, p. 114, *KU*, 5:229)

Of course, “paying no attention to natural ends” can be seen as a further point, but the botanist example at least partly repeats the main point made above: namely, that in order to make certain kind of judgments, you must be able to limit your attention to certain things available to you and not let other things, such as your knowledge base, come in the way of

your appreciation of the object. As one might also want to put it, conceptual knowledge is irrelevant for aesthetic appreciation (Budd 2002, p. 11n14).⁵

More technically put, to attend to the object's form, as required by the judgment of taste, is to apprehend the object in mere intuition.⁶ Crucially for current purposes, as Kant says explicitly in the Section VIII of the Introduction to the third *Critique*, apprehension (*Auffassung*, also *apprehensio*) takes place "prior to any concept" (Kant 2000b, p. 78; *KU*, 5:192). Though he also suggests that usually the goal of apprehension is "to unite the intuition with concepts for a cognition in general" (*ibid.*), clearly such a unification is something that need not happen. He repeats the very same point in his lectures in the 1790s when he remarks that understanding *can* connect with intuition or the "representation through the senses" (Kant 2001, p. 480; *V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1010). Most importantly for the present purposes, as Kant suggests in the third *Critique*, uniting intuition with the concept(s) of the object furnished by understanding must not happen insofar as the grounding of an aesthetic judgment is concerned. Instead, since the ultimate ground of judgments of taste depends on (or indeed is) intuition, which is the "representation through which the object is given (not through which it is thought)" (Kant 2000b, p. 115; *KU*, 5:230), you are supposed to apprehend the object by targeting it as it is given to you merely sensibly.

Apprehension involves the power of imagination, which Kant identifies with the faculty of intuition in the third *Critique* (e.g. *KU*, 5:190). As he further explicates in the lectures: "All objects of sense-intuition or the power of imagination are also objects of the aesthetic power of judgment" (Kant 2001, p. 480; *V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1010). Thus, whatever we "intuit" is a potential object of aesthetic judgment—including, apparently, imagined objects too.

In addition to sense-intuition and the power of imagination, the procedure for finding out whether an object is beautiful also involves understanding. This is a delicate issue. As Kant infamously has it, we are supposed to recognize the beauty of the object when our imagination and understanding are in "harmony" as we attend to the object disinterestedly. Accordingly, beauty is not exactly an objective feature of the object itself, but a feature of our own mental constitution that may or may not end up in a certain kind of state in the apprehension of a certain kind of object (see e.g. *KU*, 5:211). For example, if I judge that the rose is beautiful, even though I do attribute beauty to the object, ultimately this means that this particular rose has the power to produce a certain kind of pleasurable mental state in me as I examine the rose. To this extent, judgments of taste are like any aesthetic judgments.

⁵ Budd writes: "Aesthetic appreciation of a bird's song appears to be the same before and after you learn which type of bird it is, or whether you know it is a song thrush, say, and how a song thrush looks, at rest or in flight." To my mind, this formulation captures Kant's non-cognitive view of free beauty perfectly.

⁶ I shall concentrate on the formal aesthetic judgments for the moment, but basically the same applies to material judgments based on sense-sensation, since it is through intuition that we access sensible objects, and as empirical, intuition always contains sensation as well.

Much ink has been spilled on the harmony of the faculties.⁷ I am suspicious, however, how much really rests on this rather speculative-sounding notion. To skip a detail or two, I take Kant's key point to be simply this. As we examine an object, we may encounter "a certain purposiveness" (Kant 2000b, p. 120n; *KU*, 5:236*) in the way we confront the object, although this purposiveness has nothing to do with any of the ends attributable to the object. Rather, the purposiveness in question is "a purposiveness of the representational state of the subject" (Kant 2000b, p. 112; *KU*, 5:227). Crucially for current purposes, however, such a purposiveness without external purpose—ultimately reflecting the fact that objects regarded as beautiful nonetheless seem as if they were designed for our faculties—rests on the objects' perceptual shape (*Gestalt*) or form (*Form*) (*KU*, 5: 279).⁸ The task of the imagination is to observe the perceptual form as if the imagination was merely playing with the object, which also implies that the imagination is not restricted by concepts (*KU*, 5:230). In the process, understanding does not—or is not let to, as it were—fulfill its usual cognitive function of uniting intuition with concepts, at least not insofar as the grounding of aesthetic judgment is concerned.

Again, the minimized involvement of the faculty of understanding need not mean that we must totally ignore our beliefs and knowledge about the observed objects. As adult human beings with complex conceptual repertoires, something like that would indeed be easier said than done. Besides, we judge the rose to be beautiful in our examination of it—we do not simply gaze at it. However, it seems to me that this observation would still be beside Kant's main point, which is that it must be possible for us to access what is merely sensibly given to us as we engage with objects, or otherwise we could not make properly grounded aesthetic judgments about them. It may thus sound, paradoxically, that we need to cognitively abandon everything else in the aesthetic examination of objects and that we do not need to do so because we cannot.

Maybe the following example helps to ease this apparent tension. Suppose there is a table in front of you. As you look at its rectangular shape, you also attend to the sensation that you get when you feel its surface with your hand. In addition to this, suppose you think what a smooth table it is—much smoother than your previous table, say. None of this means, however, that the exact way you feel the smoothness of the table would somehow disappear from you when you attend to its rectangular form or compare the texture of this table to the texture of that other table you recall from memory. Instead, you have got yourself a full-blown experience that makes all these things and aspects available to you. At the same time, these different things and aspects are perfectly distinguishable and detachable from the all of it, including their sources. For example, the smooth texture felt haptically against your fingertips as such is detachable from the shape-perception of the tabletop, just as the judgment about the two tables is detachable from the sensations you

⁷ For more on the harmony of the faculties, including an excellent overview of different types of interpretation, see Guyer 2002.

⁸ As Kant remarks in the lectures, the form "is subject to sensible or pure intuition" (Kant 2001, p. 480; *V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1010). Kant can be read here as pointing out that the form is ultimately conditioned by the a priori intuition of space. This will turn out important in the concluding remarks of this article.

had when you touched them, just as both of these instances of perception are detachable from remembrance. Most importantly, all these different aspects and stances towards objects can in their turn serve as grounds of judgment.

Let me draw another example from pictorial arts. Basing your judgment on the form of the drawing does not obviously require that you leave the colors unattended. Indeed, it would be next to impossible to visually perceive anything like that. As Kant himself rightly emphasizes, the colors actually help us attend to the object (*KU*, 5:225-226). At the same time, Kant would insist that in order to make a formal aesthetic judgment about the drawing, you cannot base your judgment on colors or color-sensations. Instead, you must base your judgment on the form of the object—in this case, more specifically, on the drawn figure—provided through your sense-intuition of the object. Similarly, if it is a material aesthetic judgment that you are making, then you must base your judgment on the sense-sensations that accompany the intuition of the object. Crucially for understanding Kant's aesthetic theory and the view of perceptual examination of objects at its background, only by having access to such grounds can we have something to merely reflect and contemplate upon. Next, we shall turn to these two notions.

4. Contemplation and Mere Reflection versus Conceptual Thinking

As I argued in the previous section(s), Kant's view of aesthetic judgment depends on the idea that we can attend to the sensibly given, whether that originates in sense-sensation or sense-intuition (as Kant called sensations and intuitions in one of his lectures). Kant himself stresses this by distinguishing between representations through which the objects are given and representations through which the objects are thought (*KU*, 5:230). The kind of representing through which we attend to the sensibly given might be called a purely aesthetic examination of objects. In the case of material aesthetic judgment, this would mean attending to the way the object affects the senses in sensation. In the case of formal aesthetic judgments, purely aesthetic examination would require attending to the form of the object given in intuition.

To this extent, the kind of judgment we make depends on what we are attending to. It can also be that we do not attend to some of the perceptual aspects at all, although they are still "there" all the time. This can also be due to our physical constitution. Kant alludes to this at one point in the *Anthropology*, when he states that "sight comes nearer to being a *pure intuition* (the immediate representation of the given object, without admixture of noticeable sensation)." (Kant 2009, p. 268; *Anth*, 7: 156) As one might also put it, we can alternate our focus on the material and formal aspects of perceptual content, depending on which kind of judgment we are aiming at. Since Kant mostly discusses the kind of aesthetic judgment that targets the formal aspects, i.e. the judgment of taste, let us focus on it for the time being.

In the third *Critique*, when Kant analyzes the concept of sublime,⁹ he alludes to the distinction between purely aesthetic representing and thinking as follows:

[W]e must not take the sight of the ocean as we think it, enriched with all sorts of knowledge (which are not, however, contained in the immediate intuition), [...] rather, one must consider the ocean merely as the poets do, in accordance with what its appearance [*Augenschein*] shows[.] (Kant 2000b, p. 152; *KU*, 5:270)

As I read this passage, for a poem to be sublime, it must reflect the way the subject of the poem—here, the ocean—shows itself to the eye (*Augenschein*), which in turn must have a special kind of effect on us. In particular, the poem, to be a sublime representation of nature, is not supposed to reflect our knowledge of nature. As Kant points out, such knowledge is not available to us immediately in intuition, implying in addition that a successfully sublime poem must reflect just that, namely, what is “contained in the immediate intuition.”

The more general point Kant wants to emphasize with this distinction is, again, the difference between judging “on the basis of what he has before his sense” and judging “on the basis of what he has in his thoughts” (Kant 2000b, p. 116; *KU*, 5:231). As should be clear by now, aesthetic judging is of the former kind. The archetype of such judgment is the judgment of taste, which Kant also describes as contemplative:

[T]he judgment of taste is merely contemplative, i.e., a judgment that, indifferent with regard to the existence of an object, merely connects its constitution together with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. But this contemplation itself is also not directed to concepts; for the judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment (neither a theoretical nor a practical one), and hence it is neither grounded on concepts nor aimed at them. (Kant 2000b, p. 95; *KU*, 5:209)

For the purposes of this paper, the most crucial thing in the passage—beside the already made points that aesthetic judgment must not be grounded on concepts and that aesthetic judgment is not even aimed at conceptual understanding of objects—is the following phrase: “this contemplation itself is also not directed to concepts.” As I read him, by this Kant wants to underline that the act of contemplation itself must be non-conceptual, not just the feeling involved.

As we have seen, judgments of taste require that the imagination can play freely with the object, which involves apprehending the object in mere intuition. Now, for Kant, thinking about the object would require bringing the object under concepts and letting the faculty of understanding determine the act of apprehension, i.e. the way the intuition is to be united with concepts. However, as we have seen, this need not happen and indeed must not happen if the imagination is to remain in the kind of state that is required for grounding a judgment of taste. In other words, you are not supposed to bring the object under

⁹ For a detailed analysis of Kant’s view on the sublime, see Crowther 1989.

concepts with respect to those sensible features upon which your aesthetic judgment is to be based, most notably the object's *Gestalt*.

More generally, all of the above suggests what can be called a contemplative model of perception. Such a view suggests that the perceiving subject is presented with things to look at and listen to—and so on and so forth for the rest of the sensory modalities—and, most importantly, to aesthetically reflect upon. Such a stance also requires that concepts do not come in the way of contemplation (or, say, mere tasting, if it is a material judgment that is at stake). More technically put, contemplation can carry on as long as concepts are not being used to actively determine the content of perception. As a matter of fact, such a stance seems to be demanded by the possibility of aesthetic power of judgment itself. As Kant wrote in the longer, unpublished introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,

for the logical power of judgment intuitions, even if they are merely sensible (aesthetic), must first be raised to concepts in order to serve for cognition of the object, which is not the case with aesthetic power of judgment. (Kant 2000c, p. 46; *EEKU*, 20:247)

We have already provided reasons to think that the kind of proto-cognitive situation, where intuitions are not “raised to concepts”, consists in apprehension that remains merely contemplative. As one might also put it, contemplation comes very close to apprehension done for its own sake. Kant also coins such an operation as “mere reflection on a given intuition” (Kant 2000b, p. 197; *KU*, 5:320). One might also describe such a merely reflecting or mirroring stance as follows. In full-blown contemplation, it is as if our thoughts about objects escape us and we let our sensibility lead the way. However, even then it is certainly not the case that the objects themselves escape us. In other words, Kant's view suggests that merely contemplative perception or reflection is nevertheless “objectual”. In above, we tried to concretize this idea with the table example: even if you were thinking about the old table, you could still perceptually attend to the new table, and indeed merely sensibly.

Such an interpretation, as unorthodox as it may be, has some benefits, among them the fact that it leaves plenty of room for the idea that our sensible representations of objects remain richer in content than our thoughts about those very same objects. Indeed, perhaps in some cases we simply fail to achieve a determinate or precise enough conceptual determination of the object no matter how hard we try. In the third *Critique*, Kant alludes to such a possibility with the notion of inexponible (*inexponibele*) intuition, by which he means intuition that gives us more than we can express linguistically (*KU*, 5:314, 342-343; see also Makkreel 2002, p. 240).¹⁰ As far as the faculties are concerned, this also means that sensibility, the faculty of intuition and imagination, can provide us with representations of objects that we simply cannot capture, at least not thoroughly, in a

¹⁰ To be precise, Kant uses the term ‘representation of imagination’, but as we have seen, by this he means intuition. He also calls such inexponible or ineffable sensible representations aesthetic ideas, the counterparts of which are ideas of reason, i.e. concepts that cannot be demonstrated sensibly (*KU*, 5:342-343).

determinate thought—representations that the understanding cannot fully grasp, i.e. synthesize according to concepts. As Kant and many others would have it, the realms of art and nature are full of objects that can provide us with such representations. Moreover, as one might put it, this ineffable character of aesthetic experience, if anything, makes these objects aesthetically valuable.

5. Contemplative Model of Perception and the *Critique of Pure Reason*

One question that arises in light of the above is the compatibility of the purely contemplative account of perception with Kant's views in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹¹ This is not the time and place to dive deep into the thorny debate about the role of non-conceptual content and the like in Kant's theory of cognition, however.¹² Instead, let me try to show, in a brief and general fashion, how the contemplative model of perception suggested above can be regarded as fully compatible with Kant's views in the *Critique of Pure Reason* without, say, assuming that Kant changed his views between the first and the third *Critique*.

Perhaps the most important thing to acknowledge is that one of the core features of Kant's account of aesthetic examination or contemplation is that it is not even supposed to be an activity that aims at cognition (see *KU*, 5:209). Indeed, one of Kant's main points in making the distinction between aesthetic and cognitive judgment in the first place must be that only cognitive judgment is grounded on a definite rule or principle, which for Kant involves bringing the object of judgment under a concept.¹³ Key parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason* deal exactly with the latter kind of cognition-aiming activity. However, key parts of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* do not.

Another thing to keep in mind at this point is that the non-conceptual dealings with objects, as required by contemplation, only need to imply that the objects are not epistemically assessed insofar as grounding one's aesthetic judgment is concerned. Put this way, one might claim that in order to judge aesthetically, you must focus on the particular

¹¹ Janaway, for example, uses the slogan "intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B75) to question a purely formalistic reading of Kant (Janaway 1997, p. 472). Guyer, in turn, points out in the editorial notes to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that making cognitive judgments about objects requires the categories, which is supposed to have the consequence that "even the most common cognitive experience depends upon concepts" (Kant 2000b, 372n47). A variation of this claim is that object-individuation is only possible with concepts or that we could not even be conscious of objects without applying determinate concepts to them (Guyer 2002, pp. 179-180). For contrast, see e.g. Allais 2009.

¹² For more on this, see e.g. Heidemann 2016.

¹³ Some commentators seem to think that in aesthetic judging the object of judgment must be brought under some concept, it is just that it is indeterminate which concept it is, or that the concept itself is indeterminate (see Guyer 2002, pp. 165-166). To my mind, at least two things get mixed in these interpretations. Firstly, concepts being involved in judgment or the overall examination of objects is one thing, to (not) ground one's judgment on concepts is quite another. Secondly, when Kant speaks of an indeterminate concept as a ground of the judgment of taste, he refers to "supersensible substratum" as something that we can think of as underlying the appearances, including ourselves (Kant 2000b, pp. 215-216; *KU*, 5:339-340; see also *KU*, 5:196). Such a viewpoint, however, clearly is not something that features in every actual judgment but something that belongs to Kant's more general explanation of the universality of judgments of taste (see also Guyer 2002, p. 176n34).

object offered to you by the senses (see *KU*, 5:186; cf. *Anth* 7:145), and, moreover, in the way that lets you attend to the exact way the object appears to you. Kant's use of the term *Augenschein*, which he contrasts with a thought about objects, is particularly telling in this context. Another revealing passage can be found from the so-called *Dohna-Wundlacken Logic*, where Kant is recorded to have said: "E.g., tasteful poetic descriptions of regions, which produce only intuition, do not serve at all for cognition, are only cosmetic" (Kant 1992, p. 444; *V-Lo/Dohna*, 24:706). And here is yet another illuminating passage from the third *Critique*: "Beauty in nature [...] is ascribed to objects only in relation to reflection on their outer intuition, thus only to the form of their surfaces [...]" (Kant 2000b, 246; *KU*, 5:375).

Again, such a non-cognitive view on objects that centers on "the form of their surfaces" is clearly something that is not at stake in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant, as far as his theory of cognition is concerned, ultimately analyzes cognitive (objective) judgment. Just as importantly, nowhere in the first *Critique* Kant says that concepts or judgments have something to do with the exact way objects present themselves to the senses. Some commentators seem to think that perceptual content is "contaminated" by concepts according to Kant, but I do not think that this is at all the case, and many things Kant says in the third *Critique* is a case in point.

Kant hints at what I have called the contemplative model of perception in other places as well. In the first *Critique*, Kant suggests time and again that objects are *given* in intuition—or as we put it above, that mere intuition is already an objectual representation (see also e.g. McLearn 2016, pp. 99-100; Okrent 2002, p. 94). In addition, Kant suggests that synthesis as such is but a mere effect of imagination (A78/B103), which too stands in opposition with the idea that all kinds of representational activity would require synthesizing the manifold of intuition according to the concepts of understanding. In support of this, Kant also points out that "in itself the synthesis of imagination [...] is nevertheless always sensible, for it combines the manifold only as it appears in intuition, e.g., the shape of the triangle" (A124). This passage, which I take to be crucial in understanding Kant's views on perception, can be read as suggesting that the way an object shows itself purely sensibly speaking falls outside the scope of what Kant is trying to explain about synthesis in the first *Critique* (see also e.g. Laiho 2020).

Moreover, as Kant points out in the metaphysics lectures, the faculty of understanding deals with objects in general terms: "It represents only the object in general, without looking to the manner of its appearance" (Kant 2001, p. 256; *V-Met/Mron*, 29:888). Similarly, in another lecture, Kant points out that "the logical power of judgment judges the object not as such in intuition but rather through reason alone" (Kant 2001, p. 480; *V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1010). Accordingly, as far as our conceptual and cognitive understanding of objects goes, it seems that we must present the objects in a way that abstracts from the exact manner the objects appear to our senses. This in turn suggests that in fully cognitive dealings with objects we need to ground our representations on objects' shared features (see also e.g. *Log*, 9:58). In contrast to this,

arguably any such generalizable, rule-indicating property is something on which *not* to ground one's aesthetic judgment. Rather, aesthetic judgments are grounded on sheer particularity that lacks that kind of general or universal projectability (see also Cohen 2002, p. 3). This is intimately related to Kant's point that there are no rules of taste, the point being that if there were such rules, the beauty of the object would not only be generalizable and suitable for testimony, but beauty would also indicate a genuine property of an object, which, however, is exactly what Kant denies (e.g. *KU*, 5:211).

To press on the point, the fact that we express our aesthetic appreciation of objects with concepts—including putting the general label 'beautiful' on them—does not need to undermine the idea that the basis of aesthetic appreciation has little to do with concepts. What the contemplative model of perception suggests is that the grounding elements of aesthetic judgments—either the sensible form of the object or its immediate effect on the senses, together with the feelings that follow or accompany them—are utterly non-conceptual features of our experience and have to remain so in order to serve as proper grounds of aesthetic judgment.

To put it differently, as Kant implies in the lectures, the aesthetic power of judgment has to do with the determination of the object of senses “according to the laws of sensibility” (Kant 2001, p. 480; *V-Met/Arnoldt* aka *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, 29:1010). The case of aesthetic examination being ultimately governed by the laws of sensibility can be seen as largely analogical with Kant's analysis of the so-called incongruent counterparts.¹⁴ The basic idea of that analysis is that the exact spatial configuration of such counterparts—your left and right hand, for example—and the way they occupy their places in space reveals something that our concepts cannot account for. Instead, the ultimate difference of such counterparts is grounded in space (see esp. *Prol*, 4:285-286). Most importantly for the purposes of this paper, you may think about your hands as you like, yet the very thing that makes you treat them as uniquely different remains independent of your thoughts about them. Similarly, in aesthetic judging, even though making an actual aesthetic judgment features concepts, the very thing you base your judgment upon remains independent of any concepts. In other words, the ground of your aesthetic judgment is (and indeed must be) something purely sensible—just as the very difference between the two otherwise seemingly similar hands.

It could be argued further that it is indeed space that provides the ultimate support for Kant's universalistic theory of taste, according to which we may demand agreement in matters of taste, though no-one can prove the truth of their judgment.¹⁵ The argument might go roughly as follows. Space is shared by all human judges. Judgments of taste are grounded on the sensible forms of objects. These forms or *Gestalten* are grounded in space. If you and I manage to ground our individual judgments only on such formal features of

¹⁴ For more on incongruent counterparts, see e.g. Hanna 2008.

¹⁵ Of course, it might be, and probably is, difficult to extend the idea of space or spatiality being the ultimate basis of aesthetic appreciation to all kinds of artworks. Then again, at the core of Kant's theory one finds natural objects, rather than artworks, as the paradigm objects of aesthetic appreciation, which might ease that difficulty somewhat.

objects, we can claim to have achieved a universal standpoint on them (at least humanly or “subjectively” speaking; see A26/B42). This is because regarding objects this way has its roots in that which allows us to represent them (or indeed any spatial objects) in the first place. Of course, the aesthetic examination of objects also needs to have a specific effect on the mind to have the objects count as beautiful, the universality of which we cannot ascertain in the same way. However, this factor is external to the purely sensible representational ground given in the object’s form, which ground is there regardless of whether we assess the object’s beauty or not.

As a final remark, let me repeat that the above findings do not mean that the judger needs to be in a non-cognitive state altogether when she aesthetically examines and appreciates an object. This is to say, among other things, that the judger does not need to completely cease to conceptualize the object—if she did, she would not be a judger anymore, but just a gazer. At the same time, aesthetic judgments are grounded not only on feeling but on a representational content—be it a sense-intuition or sense-sensation—that by itself must be wholly non-conceptual, and must also be so taken, for it to serve as a proper kind of ground for aesthetic judgment. As should be clear by now, this kind of representational content is the exact way the object appears to the senses as the object is examined purely aesthetically or contemplatively. Such an examination, which by itself does not depend on concepts at all, must not only be possible according to Kant but seems to tell us something deeply true about a certain—albeit very limited—type of aesthetic appreciation of objects more generally.

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