

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KANT'S PURE AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

Paul Crowther

IN RECENT years *The Critique of Judgement* has generated a body of interpretative scholarship, that *begins* to compare with that accruing to the first *Critique*, and Kant's writings on moral philosophy. However, this body of work has so far been largely interpretative in a narrow sense—concentrating on issues pertaining to the structure and internal problematics of Kant's arguments. There have been few sustained attempts¹ to articulate the broader significance of his views, on the lines, say of P. F. Strawson's and Henry Allison's reworking of the first *Critique*, or Onora O'Neill's deployment of Kant's moral philosophy.

In this paper, I shall take a few modest steps in this broader direction. Specifically, I shall clarify the general philosophical significance of Kant's approach to the pure aesthetic judgement.

As a prelude to this main task, it is worth offering a brief overview of Kant's general preoccupations in the third *Critique*. First, his basic strategy is to bridge the divide between humanity's natural mechanistically determined being and its capacity for free moral existence. Kant's reasons for doing this are complex, as are the principles whereby the gulf between nature and freedom is bridged. In the most general terms, however, the key connecting term is that of teleology. On the one hand, the teeming complexity of organic nature compels us to think of that world *as if* it were a purposive and hierarchical system produced by artifice, so as to be accessible to the ends of human cognition. On the other hand, thinking of nature in these hierarchical purposive terms also leads to the idea of some ultimate purpose or 'final end' of the system as a whole. For Kant, this final end is the existence of free rational *moral beings*.²

Aesthetic factors play a decisive role in this teleological mediation between nature and freedom. To show this one must make a basic contrast (which I shall build on as this paper progresses). Ordinary teleological judgements involve some natural item being related to the form (or 'end') which defines items of that kind. Mediation by a specific concept is *always* involved. The pure aesthetic judgement, in contrast, is irreducibly singular. Here an item is not judged as purposive through instantiating a specific 'concept of an end'. Rather in our perception of the item's phenomenal structure, basic cognitive

capacities which are essential to judgement *per se*, are brought into a free and mutually stimulating interaction. This interaction is teleological in a subjective sense, in so far as it is conducive to the end or purpose of cognition in general. Indeed, for even more complex reasons, it also tends to make us more susceptible to moral feeling.

Now from this schematic overview it should already be clear that, for Kant, the pure aesthetic judgement has both a distinctive character and structure, and plays an important role in linking nature, cognition, and freedom. In the main body of this discussion, I shall try to illuminate (both sympathetically and critically) the general worth of Kant's approach. It should be noted, however, that the discussion will focus almost exclusively on the pure aesthetic judgement in its most basic form—the enjoyment of natural *beauty*. (The question of sublimity and fine art, are much more complex, and I have addressed them at length elsewhere.)³

In Part I, then, I shall clarify the major logical characteristics of the pure aesthetic judgement, namely its *disinterestedness*. Particular attention will be paid to rectifying a common misconception of this notion. In Part II, I will analyse the ontological ground of the pure aesthetic judgement *vis-à-vis* the interaction of cognitive capacities mentioned above. It will be argued that this interaction both focuses on (what I shall call) the possibility of conceptualization, and has viability beyond Kant's specific philosophical position. Finally, in Part III, I will develop a line of argument indicated by Kant in relation to the moral significance of the aesthetic. In so developing it, I will show that whilst it does not issue in an outcome which would have been acceptable to Kant, it does, nevertheless, show that the pure aesthetic judgement has a primordial significance. It embodies and discloses fundamental truths about the human mode of inhering in the world.

I

For Kant, our capacity to experience pleasure or displeasure has three major varieties.⁴ The first of these is the 'agreeable'. Such sensations are occasioned pathologically, that is to say, by the causal impact of specific stimuli upon the sense organs. They are, in essence, subjective responses, which hinge purely on matters of personal preference and aversion. Agreeable sensations, in other words, serve no significant cognitive function in themselves.

The second major basis of pleasure and displeasure in Kant is determined by an item's or state of affair's relation to the 'good'. This involves locating the item (or whatever) in relation to networks of ideas and principles. Something is good in the sense of being a means to a desired end; or, more directly, through satisfying general criteria which define quality and desirability in things of that kind. Pleasure in the good, in other words, always presupposes that the particular item is judged in relation to its utility for, or conformity to, some function or standard which is, in a sense, *external* to it.

We thus arrive at what, for Kant, is the third distinctive source of pleasure and displeasure, namely the pure aesthetic judgement. The judgement of beauty is the major example of this.⁵ Kant's initial formulation of it is by way of a contrast with the other two sources of pleasure. His way of articulating this distinction, however, is extremely contorted, and, in many respects, confusing. The validity of the distinction can, nevertheless, be viably expressed *using* Kant's own terms as follows. Our pleasure in the agreeable and the good are 'interested' modes of enjoyment in so far as they depend upon the 'real existence' of the object which occasions them. In order, for example, to enjoy the taste of a certain kind of food, the food really must be as good as it looks. The appearance of agreeableness is not enough. The object must actually possess the physical properties which will occasion the agreeable sensations in us. This dependence upon real existence also characterizes our pleasure in the good. If something is good because it satisfies some broader set of functional or evaluative criteria, then the mere appearance of satisfying such functions or standards will not do. The item's goodness is determined by its satisfaction of truth conditions, i.e. broader considerations appertaining to 'real existence'.

In the case of the pure aesthetic judgement, however, matters are rather different. As Kant puts it,

It is quite plain that in order to say that the object *is beautiful*, and to show that I have taste, everything turns on the meaning which I can give to this representation, and not on any factor which makes me dependent on the real existence of the object.⁶

The point here is that our pleasure in beauty is purely a function of how the object *appears* to the senses. What kind of thing the object is, its relevance for our practical interests, indeed whether the object is real or not, are questions which have no necessary bearing on our enjoyment of its mere appearance. In its rootedness in the immediate sensible particular, therefore, our pleasure can be characterized as *disinterested*.

Kant's major point of philosophical substance, then, is that disinterestedness is a *logical* characteristic which separates pure aesthetic judgements from those of the agreeable and good. Such aesthetic judgements are, in logical terms, indifferent to the real existence of the object. It is, however, important to be clear about the scope and significance of this claim. In respect of it, Kant has been very badly served by subsequent tradition. Formalists such as Clive Bell, Edmund Bullough, and Harold Osborne, for example, have, in effect, interpreted the disinterested aspect of aesthetic judgement as though it were in essence psychological—a kind of detached attitude or mental stance wherein one purges oneself of all considerations deriving from 'real existence'. Many critics of disinterestedness such as George Dickie, Richard Shusterman, and

manifold Marxist and feminist theoreticians, have interpreted it in similar terms. This has led them to the view that there simply 'ain't no such thing' or, indeed (in the case of Marxists), that the very idea of a detached 'disinterested' standpoint is itself ideologically 'interested' to the highest degree.⁷

Now there are elements in Kant—such as his additional characterization of the pure aesthetic judgement as 'contemplative'—which lend some weight to this interpretative tradition. These, however, pale into insignificance alongside Kant's—wholly valid—logic of negation. The key *logical* significance of the pure aesthetic judgement lies in what it does *not* presuppose in order to be enjoyed. To take pleasure in the way things appear to the senses is *just* that. We may find that our being in a position to experience such pleasure, has required a certain path through life; it may also be that a lot of factual knowledge and practical considerations impinge upon our pleasure. However, such factors are not *logical* preconditions of our enjoying beauty: they are contingent elements. We do not *have* to take account of them in appreciating formal qualities for their own sake.

That being said, however, it may be that in its very contrast to forms of 'interested' pleasure, it is possible, in some circumstances, that the disinterestedness of the pure aesthetic judgement takes on a felt, psychological character. This would have no bearing on the judgement's logical status *qua* aesthetic, but it might be taken as disclosing the aesthetic's link to broader primordial factors in the human condition. This is a possibility which I shall consider in Part III. Before that, the ontological ground of the pure aesthetic judgement must be considered. It is to this I now turn.

II

First, Kant sees our pleasure in the pure aesthetic judgement as arising from a harmony of the cognitive faculties. He observes that 'a representation whereby an object is given, involves, in order that it may become a source of cognition at all, *imagination* for bringing together the manifold of intuition, and *understanding* for the unity of the concept uniting the representations'.⁸ This, of course, is a familiar tenet from the first *Critique*.⁹ The particular act of judgement involves the subsumption or discrimination of sensible particulars under a concept or concepts. This itself is only possible through the exercise of our imagination's powers of attention, recall, and projection. The generation of images enables us to relate an item to past, present, and possible appearances. It is the basis of a unified temporal horizon which, in tandem with the understanding's application of concepts, stabilizes the manifold, and enables the item to be identified as such and such a thing. This *ability to generate images*—to create conditions of temporal continuity in the sensible manifold—is what Kant calls 'productive imagination'. In its normal highly specific *employments*, it is tightly directed by a relevant concept, and functions in a fundamentally 'reproductive' way. For example, in conceptualizing something

as a 'dog', our application of the concept will be informed (tacitly or explicitly) by expectations based on associations between the present creature and our previous experience of dog-type appearances and behaviour.

The co-operation of understanding and imagination in its reproductive function, then, is the basis of what might be called *normal specificatory judgements*. These are acts of subsumption or discrimination which affirm that specific relations hold. Such judgements have definiteness of sense, and are the basis of everyday cognitive life. They exemplify and exist in a context which might be characterized as *discursively rigid*, in so far as they locate us in a realm which involves the application of definite concepts to definite objects on the basis of definite practical interests or physiological needs.

The case of the pure aesthetic judgement is very different. In engaging with a beautiful form Kant suggests that

The cognitive powers brought into play by this representation are here engaged in a free play, since no definite concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition. Hence the mental state in this representation must be one of a feeling of the free play of the powers of representation . . .¹⁰

This raises two questions, namely, what exactly is involved in this free play, and why should it be pleasurable? I shall address these questions in turn.

First, we will recall from Part I that Kant characterizes the pure aesthetic judgement as 'apart from any concept', but in the foregoing remark he claims that it involves 'no definite concept'. Now if Kant's theory is to do any useful philosophical work, we must read these contrasting characterizations as differences of emphasis rather than substance. For whilst (in order for Kant to be consistent with his overall account of judgement) the pure aesthetic mode must have some conceptual content, it must also have much more than *just* conceptual content. This means that judgement must here function in something other than its normal specificatory mode. On these terms, the 'apart from any concept' characterization should be taken simply as an overstated emphasis of the pure aesthetic judgement's exceptional status. A better way of putting it would be to say that such judgements focus *on the possibility of a manifold's conceptualizability per se*, rather than its relation to a definite concept.

But how are we to make this more specific? One important clue is provided by Kant's emphases on the role of the productive imagination. Consider the following passage:

If . . . imagination must in the judgement of taste be regarded as in its freedom, then, to begin with, it is not taken as reproductive, as in its subjection to the laws of association, but as productive and exerting an activity of its own (as originator of arbitrary forms of possible intuitions).¹¹

To make sense of this, we must recall how in the normal specificatory judgement, the relation between imagination and understanding is discursively

rigid. Now a phenomenal form—such a bird of paradise's plumage, or an arabesque—can be described in just these rigid terms. We identify them as formal configurations which are characteristic of this particular kind of bird, or this particular kind of ornament. However, to judge them as *beautiful*, entails that these forms have relations of unity and diversity which are amenable to sustained cognitive exploration. In discriminating the relation between parts and whole in the bird's plumage, for example, what may engross us is the way the overall shape contains and directs sequences of colour and texture, and other contours within the manifold. We explore the various phenomenal sub-unities in relation to both one another and the structure of the whole. In the case of the arabesque, matters can be even more complex. The visual rhythm of the pattern may suggest continuations beyond that which is immediately given. We find formal cues which enable us to, as it were, rhapsodically continue the rhythm in imagination. Again, in exploring the way in which one colour limits or tends to negate or neutralize other colours, we might see and develop this as a *process* of formal interaction, taking the given configuration as one moment in a continuous movement which might be traced back to imaginary previous stages, or forward to future ones. Yet again, the *gestalt* character of specific forms within the ornament may be such that we can see them as either foreground or background elements. With each switch from one to the other, the whole structure of virtual space is reconfigured into new possibilities.

Now, as Kant's celebrated example of the house in the first *Critique's* Second Analogy shows, the unity of an object—as opposed to an event—can be perceptually apprehended in a random order. As he puts it 'my perceptions could begin with the apprehension of the roof and end with the basement, or could begin from below and end above; and I could similarly apprehend the manifold of the empirical intuition either from right to left or from left to right'.¹² Kant further suggests that whilst the subjective successions of perceptions here is 'arbitrary', 'it does not prove anything as to the manner in which the manifold is connected in the object'.¹³ Hence, whilst the order of our perceptions in relation to an object is arbitrary, this arbitrariness has no bearing on its specifically objective unity. However, in perceiving the beauty of a bird's plumage or an arabesque, very different considerations hold. For the *aesthetic unity* of the object is a function of the interplay between phenomenal form and the different *possible* avenues of cognitive exploration and development which it can open up. An element of randomness in judgement, in other words, is partially *constitutive* of aesthetic unity. In contrast with the objective form of manifolds of sensible intuition, we are dealing here with 'arbitrary forms of possible intuitions'. The imagination is not tied to the retention or projection of appearance on exact associational lines dictated by a specific concept. It is, rather, able to function at the level of its definitive being—as a productive capacity which creates possibilities of unity in the manifold.

This extraordinary contrast between the discursive rigidity of empirical perception, and the freedom of aesthetic judgement has not, I think, been at all properly developed in the existing interpretative literature.¹⁴ One reason for this is that in the third *Critique* Kant has hardly anything explicit to say about those 'pure concepts of the understanding' or 'categories' which are so decisive in the first *Critique*. However, they do play a crucial role implicitly to the degree that the pure aesthetic judgement serves to 'refer a given representation to cognition in general'.¹⁵ This is why, earlier on, I suggested that such judgements focus on the possibility of a manifold's conceptualizability. The evocation of the productive imagination noted above demands not empirical concepts, but the categories—and, especially, the quantitative and qualitative ones. These are (respectively) unity, plurality, and totality, and reality, negation, and limitation. In judging beautiful form—as I tried to show in my examples—these categories interact in loose, experimental, explorative ways, allowing a similar flexibility in the way imagination holds on to, and projects the manifold. In one sense the beautiful configuration is cognitively unstable. However, this is not a loss of intelligibility—a kind of cognitive breakdown. Rather, we have, as it were, cognition *in the making*. Imagination and understanding rediscover their original and mutual formative power through creating possibilities of conceptualizability. The very fabric and impetus of cognitive life in its more general sense is renewed and replenished. (I shall return to this point at length in Part III.)

For Kant, all these considerations establish the pure aesthetic judgement as teleological in a subjective sense. On the one hand, the judgement has 'formal finality' in so far as the beautiful configuration appears *as if* it had been created for the express purpose of stimulating cognitive exploration; on the other hand, the free harmonious interaction of understanding and imagination which it brings about is 'subjectively final' in relation to cognition generally. This means that in renewing cognition's structural basis, it can be regarded as teleologically significant in relation to the attainment of knowledge—even though it is not, in itself, a claim to knowledge. In its fulfilment of this role, Kant sees the pure aesthetic judgement as intrinsically pleasurable. In his words 'it involves an inherent causality, that, namely, of *preserving a continuance* of a state of the representation itself and the active engagement of the cognitive powers without ulterior aim. We dwell on the contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation strengthens and reproduces itself.'¹⁶

Now even if we do not accept Kant's epistemology and teleology *in toto*, his approach to the pure aesthetic judgement remains a viable one. It is, for example, difficult to make sense of the term 'experience' at all, without presupposing basic cognitive capacities whose structure and function is at least akin to those which Kant attributes to imagination and understanding. And, even if we do not accept Kant's list of categories and the significance he assigns to them, the specific categories mentioned earlier do play a key role in our

characterizations of aesthetic form. They are also key concepts, generally, in the way we think about the world. Given all these points, it is reasonable to claim that Kant's grounding of the pure aesthetic judgement in the harmony of basic cognitive capacities, is an adequate general explanation of why natural and simple decorative beauty engages us, and gives us a distinctive disinterested form of pleasure. Equally importantly, it also offers a basis (in a way which few—if any—other accounts do) for thinking through the question of why, in comparison to other forms of value and pleasure, the aesthetic is given—and is, indeed, entitled to—a privileged status. I shall consider some of the ramifications of this in my final section.

III

As we saw in the introduction to this discussion, Kant's strategy in the third *Critique* is not only to clarify the distinctive structure of aesthetic judgement, but to locate it in terms of a broader project—namely, the linking of our natural and our moral being. Having, therefore, clarified the logical and ontological basis of the pure aesthetic judgement, the question arises as to whether there is anything to be said for this broader strategy. I would suggest that there is, albeit not in the specific sense that Kant desires. There is a primordial significance to the aesthetic, which can clarify the point about privileged status alluded to at the end of the last section. It can also be reached via a route signposted by Kant himself, but we will, alas, have to part company with—if not him, then at least some aspects of his main philosophical position, along the way.

To commence, Kant attempts to link aesthetic judgement and morality through two major, and sometimes overlapping, strategies. The first of these consists in the fact that in striving to achieve *universal* consensus in aesthetic judgement we create conditions which will be generally favourable to the development of moral awareness. This approach is intimately bound up with the deduction of the universal validity of pure aesthetic judgements. Since I have examined this at length elsewhere, I shall not pursue it further now.¹⁷ Instead, let us consider the second of Kant's approaches. It hinges on questions of 'supersensible' or '*a priori*' causality. The claim is, in the most general terms, that since both moral feeling and pure aesthetic pleasure are determined by factors—namely, reason and the cognitive faculties—which are the very basis of human experience, then, this causality is of a privileged order. Indeed, a capacity to feel pure aesthetic pleasure will render us all the more susceptible to moral feeling.¹⁸ As Kant puts it,

Taste makes, as it were, the transition from the charm of sense to habitual moral interest possible without too violent a leap, for it represents the imagination, even in its freedom, as amenable to a final determination for understanding, and teaches us to find, even in sensuous object, a free [i.e. disinterested] delight apart from a charm of sense.¹⁹

Now whilst Kant does not fill in the details of exactly how the pure aesthetic judgement can play this role, he does explicitly connect it here to the link between such judgements and freedom. Let us, therefore, construct an argument which is consistent with Kant's basic insight here, and then see where it leads.

First, he often treats the pure aesthetic judgement's harmony of imagination and understanding on an analogy with physiological interactions—they stimulate and enliven one another in a way that is good for our cognitive health generally. However, whilst a dimension of positive feeling is the causal consequence of this interaction, the causal dimension is not really paramount in the aesthetic judgement. Indeed, the cognitive exploration which is at the heart of such judgement is not a causal relation at all. It is a manifestation of the individual's free choice in terms of how he or she adapts to, and develops the different perceptual possibilities presented by a formal configuration. In such judgements, we act independently of the mechanistic causal framework of nature; but at the same time our relation to nature is enriched. The sensible world provides both an object, and (in the pleasurable response) a motive for continuing to search out new possibilities for free cognitive exploration.

Now what makes all this amenable to Kant's overall strategy is that, for him, morality itself is the most developed expression of freedom. However, (as Kant is at great pains to show in the *Critique of Practical Reason*,²⁰ especially) because we are finite and imperfectly rational creatures, there is always the possibility that, even in following our moral duty, we are in fact acting from unacknowledged *feelings* of self-interest or fellow-feeling. Natural impulses, in other words, impinge on and cloud the sincerity of our moral motives. But since, by definition, human beings are both free and rational, *and* natural and animal, this seems to be an impossible conflict—a contradiction at the very heart of our being. Can we not overcome this? Is there not some mediating term between the demands of our moral being, and our situatedness in nature? Of course there is—the pure aesthetic judgement. In it, morality's key precondition (freedom) is in harmony with natural factors on the lines noted above. Here at least we can be sure that nature is a stimulus for, rather than an obstacle to, freedom.

Given these points, the pure aesthetic judgement might be seen as conducive to morality through its role in what Dieter Henrich has called (in another context) Kant's 'moral image of the world'. According to this doctrine (as Henrich puts it) a moral agent 'accepts together with the validity of the moral law, a view of what the world is like: its constitution must be such that its moral effects are not indifferent to, or even counteract, morally motivated actions'.²¹ Now as we saw earlier, for Kant, concrete moral practice is in constant conflict with natural impulses; but if this antagonism were total, it would militate against the possibility of 'habitual moral interest'. In the freedom of the pure aesthetic judgement, however, we attain in the very midst

of nature, something which is higher. This means that however hostile to morality nature may seem, the hostility is not absolute. In the pure aesthetic judgement, our animality, if not transcended, is at least tempered: and in this tempering, we can take nature itself to bear the imprint of a higher order of things. It thus takes its place in our moral image of the world.

Now in constructing this argument I have tried to focus ideas found throughout the *Critique of Judgement*. In so doing, I have opened a direction of thinking wherein the broader significance of the aesthetic begins to emerge. There is, however, a decisive problem. It is this: for Kant the burden of emphasis in moral existence falls on obstacles and responsibilities in relation to the expression of freedom. In aesthetic experience it does not. Might we not say, then, that this very fact may be one that disposes us to elevate the pleasures of the aesthetic as on overriding end-in-itself. In comparison with morality it is an easy option. Hence, whilst the pure aesthetic judgement might figure in a moral image of the world, it could just as easily, if not more so, incline us to a life of self-indulgent or indolent contemplation, wherein the demands of moral duty were the least of our preoccupations. This would, of course, be anathema to Kant.

A second (less pressing) problem also arises. For even if we allow the Kantian link between pure aesthetic judgement and a moral image of the world we must ask what are the conditions which, in practice, lead us to make this link? Under what circumstances does the pure aesthetic judgement *disclose* its broader significance?

To clarify this problem, I shall now redirect Kant's basic strategy, by focusing on freedom rather than his notion of morality. First, then, the significance of freedom is not simply as a logical precondition of moral existence, it is a pervasive factor which determines, in different ways, the entire fabric of human value and endeavour. As we saw in Part II, this even extends as far as the structure of cognition itself, in so far as the pure aesthetic judgement hinges on the exploration of possibilities of conceptualizability. By this I mean that imagination and understanding here function in their ontologically primordial form as free formative powers, which, in concert, construct the sensible manifold. This is, in effect, a repetition of the ontogenesis of experience itself, and it indicates an even deeper significance to the aesthetic. One might put it like this. An infant interacts with its environment on the basis of curiosity, searching out and exploring different patterns of relation and order. In this very basic mode of cognitive activity it is guided by a propensity to mimic, and the encouragement (or otherwise) of adults. The motives for this exploration cannot, I think, be reduced to these guiding factors. Mimicry, for example, may be an innate propensity, but the complex uses to which it is put bespeak a deeper motive—namely, the exploration of possibilities of order for their own sake. Adult guidance and, indeed, the desire to please adults, are important factors in determining infant behaviour, but they do not exclusively

determine it. Left to itself, the infant will want to do things other than simply satisfy its physiological needs and the demands of adults. What I am suggesting, then, is that the motive for non-determined infant cognitive behaviour is aesthetic. It is a curiosity-for-its-own-sake which can be characterized as disinterested in so far as the infant has not yet fully articulated the categorial basis of either the world or its own self. It is playing with possibilities of order and appearance, which, in conjunction with the other mediating factors, enable a sense of reality—a systematic calibration of understanding and imagination—to be eventually achieved. Through free aesthetic exploration in concert with other natural and socializing factors, the infant gradually correlates its body with both the unity of the world and the unity of its own perspective upon it as an individual self.

Now if this account is correct, a very crude and basic mode of aesthetic judgement is a natural factor in the infant's development, and is deeply implicated in the formation of a categorial framework. It is crucial to emphasize, however, that we do not find the pure aesthetic judgement pleasurable *because* it repeats the formative stages of experience. Rather it is the free formative activity itself which is pleasurable. The significance of the repetition consists in the way in which the individual moment of aesthetic pleasure *exemplifies* a mode of experiential formation, which reaches back into, and is decisive for, the origins of individual self-consciousness.

On these terms, then, the pure aesthetic judgement has a primordial significance. Through its cognitive explorations we are immersed in a world of sensible complexity, yet we project its possibilities of unity on very much our own terms. This *free-belonging* to the world is further deepened by the way in which individual judgements exemplify the formative origins of experience. However, we now face the minor problem raised earlier in relation to Kant—namely, under what circumstances is this broader significance disclosed? The answer is, fortunately, not a difficult one. It consists in the contrast between such judgements and the patterns of everyday life. In Part II, it will be recalled, I used the notion of normal judgement's discursive rigidity to secure a contrast with the freedom of the aesthetic variety. This is much more than a logical distinction. In ordinary practical and cognitive existence, our freedom is channelled into the means/end nexus of our projects, and the procuring of the means to satisfy basic physiological needs. In this context, freedom is, as it were, caught up and hidden by the formats and structures of its realization. The pure aesthetic judgement, can stand out as special—as something higher—by its negation of this context. Again, it will be recalled that, in Part I, I used Kant's notion of disinterestedness to secure a logical distinction between aesthetic and other forms of pleasure. I further suggested, however, that a kind of psychological disinterestedness might also be found a role. That role is here. In its contrast with the 'interested' patterns and pleasures of everydayness, the aesthetic can be felt as a release and a renewal. It returns us to

something fundamental, even if we cannot put what this something is into an adequate verbal description.

Given these points, one might say that the primordial significance of the pure aesthetic judgement is disclosed *intuitively* through its felt contrast with the routines of everyday life. 'Intuitively' is, of course, a treacherous term. It can mean insights whose emergence we cannot explain, or ones whose emergence we do not have the means to explain. In this latter case, the intuition may be the result of something so intimately and deeply familiar that we simply never notice it, or something so complex that we do not even care to try and fathom it out. Our intuition concerning the special status of the pure aesthetic judgement has, perhaps, something of both these aspects. It seems to relate to factors which are simultaneously simple and deep. The intrinsic pleasure of the judgement leads us to an intuitive sense of its having a higher significance.

The importance of this consists in a final point. In much contemporary writing there is a tendency to treat the aesthetic as if it is a mere class- or gender-based preference which has been unwarrantably privileged as a higher pleasure through its role in the social power structure of certain western societies. (Pierre Bourdieu's well-known critique of Kant is a paradigm case of this approach.)²² However, the impulse to embellish, to ornament, to adorn, and to ritualize gesture—as in the case of dance—seems to be a ubiquitous feature of all human societies. Superficially this might seem to favour the rather reductionist view just noted. On these terms, we would argue that aesthetic embellishments and adornments (etc.) are found pleasing because of their efficacy in certain kinds of functional or ritual context. But against this, we must ask, why should aesthetic elements be regarded as efficacious in such contexts? Why is it that they are taken to add something to their contexts of occurrence? If it is because of some putative magical significance, again we must ask what is it about the aesthetic which *lends itself* to being interpreted in such terms? At some point in this analysis, we will be returned to the brute fact that the aesthetic is both a mode of pleasure inherent in the fabric of self-consciousness itself, and one which (however vaguely or intuitively) discloses and deepens our sense of free-belonging to the world. Kant's basic aesthetic theory enables us to think both these aspects through. This is the decisive significance of his approach to the pure aesthetic judgement.

Paul Crowther, Corpus Christi College, Oxford OX1 4JF, UK.

REFERENCES

- ¹ One notable exception is Antony Savile in his *The Test of Time* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1982) and other works.
- ² For an alternative interpretation of the 'final end', see R. K. Elliott's 'The Unity of Kant's Critique of Judgement', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol 8, No 3, 1968, pp. 244-259.
- ³ See for example my *The Kantian Sublime*.

From Morality to Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) and Chapters 3, 7, and 8 of my *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)

⁴ In this section, I will be addressing Kant's arguments as adumbrated in §§ 1–5 of Book 1 of *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). A very detailed and penetrating alternative reading of Kant's treatment of pleasure and disinterestedness can be found in Chapter 5 of Paul Guyer's *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1979). Like many other commentators on Kant, Guyer's approach to these topics tends to multiply the internal problematics of Kant's position, in a way that loses sight of the general validity of specific points.

⁵ The pure aesthetic judgement encompasses both beauty and sublimity. Kant sometimes uses the term 'judgement of taste' in relation to beauty. I prefer, however, to avoid this in so far as it is used most oppositely in relation to the *predication* of beauty as a characteristic of specific forms, rather than to our taking pleasure in the beautiful *per se*. Since, further, I am not considering sublimity in this discussion, my use of the term 'pure aesthetic judgement' should be taken as synonymous with 'enjoyment of the beautiful'.

⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, op. cit. p. 43.

⁷ For a critical discussion of some of the general issues involved here see my review article 'Sociological Imperialism and the Field of Cultural Production; The Case of Bourdieu' in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1994, pp. 155–169.

⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, op. cit. p. 43.

⁹ See especially the first edition version of 'The Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding' in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 128–150.

¹⁰ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, op. cit. p. 58.

¹¹ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, op. cit. p. 86.

¹² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit. p. 221.

¹³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit. p. 222.

¹⁴ This is true even of such thorough and impressive treatments as are found in

Guyer's book (op. cit.) and Hannah Ginsborg's *The Role of Taste in Kant's Theory of Cognition* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1988). Interestingly, Dieter Henrich does take an approach with some similarities to mine, in terms of his notion of 'the conditions of a possible conceptualisation in general' (see his *Aesthetic Judgement and the Moral Image of the World*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992). However, he does not bring in fully the role of the categories. Indeed, like Guyer and Ginsborg (and many others) his interpretative attentiveness to the details of Kant's text is not matched by a corresponding phenomenological attentiveness to the concrete experience of beautiful configurations. If, however, we are interested in the *validity* of Kant's claim, this latter consideration should be of decisive importance.

¹⁵ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, op. cit. p. 58.

¹⁶ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, op. cit. p. 64.

¹⁷ A full discussion of some of the issues involved can be found in my *The Kantian Sublime*, op. cit. pp. 60–70.

¹⁸ See for example § 42 of the *Critique of Judgement* (Book I). Kant assumes that since both aesthetic and moral feeling are the result of an 'a priori causality', then the cultivation of the former will *ipso facto* be conducive to experiencing the latter. As a casual story this is simply an assumption. To give it philosophical 'bite' we need an account of the complex intentional object of aesthetic pleasure in its relation to morality. This is what I provide in the main body of my text.

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, op. cit. p. 225.

²⁰ See for example Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. and ed. L. W. Beck, (New York and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 220–221.

²¹ Henrich, op. cit., pp. 24–25.

²² See for example Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1984), pp. 485–500.