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# THE ROLE OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENTS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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JOHN S. CALLENDER

PPP

**ABSTRACT:** This paper describes the nature of aesthetic judgments and the justifications that underpin these, with a particular focus on the theory of aesthetics set out by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*. It argues that judgments of self often take the form of aesthetic judgments, that such judgments are prevalent in the psychotherapeutic discourse, and that this has major implications for the type of dialogue that is required in therapy. Such a dialogue shares many of the characteristics of art criticism, but may be supported by scientific empiricism. Recent research on the interaction between emotion and cognition is reviewed and implications for therapeutic change are discussed. The paper concludes that aesthetic philosophy provides a common ground for emotion, cognition, ethics, and a sense of the meaningfulness of life.

**KEYWORDS:** aesthetics, ethics, Kant, therapeutic discourse, therapeutic change

**P**SYCHIATRIC DISORDERS MANIFEST THEMSELVES in the form of thinking, emotions, and behaviors that are painful, disturbing, maladaptive, or otherwise unwanted. A central aim of psychotherapy is to help patients to change the ways in which they think about themselves and the world in which they live. As a first step, we must consider the nature of their thoughts and how these are justified. Only then will we be in a position to influence change.

Propositions about the nature of things may be justified in different ways. Some propositions,

for example, mathematical theorems or the statements of logic, are justified by demonstrating adherence to formal rules of reasoning. Empirical judgments rest on experience and, in special circumstances, on experimental evidence. An empirical judgment is justified by reference to the evidence that appears to uphold it. In the case of an experiment, justification includes consideration of issues such as methodology, sample size, bias, and statistical tests of the probability of the result arising by chance. One of the most widely used forms of psychotherapy is cognitive therapy. In its original form, it hypothesized that symptoms and problems arise as a consequence of distorted empirical judgments and attempted to change these by the application of experiential evidence and rules of thinking (Beck et al. 1979).

A third form of judgment is based on ethical theory. Moral judgments rest on various systems of ethical thinking, such as Kantianism or consequentialism. In the case of Kantianism, a moral judgment is justified by argument from basic principles. On the other hand, the consequentialist justifies his or her judgments by reference to the anticipated outcomes of actions. In previous papers, I have argued that there are large overlaps in the areas of concern of Kantian moral theory and psychotherapy and that ethical judgments offer important precepts for changes in how patients behave toward themselves and others (Callender 1998, 2002).

The present paper is concerned with aesthetic judgments and the roles that these play in psychopathology and the processes of change. I argue that aesthetic judgment is a particular mode of thinking that rests on distinctive justifications and that such thinking is of major relevance to the psychotherapeutic discourse. When this is understood, the nature of the dialogue that will promote therapeutic change becomes easier to discern.

The world of aesthetic experience, in the broad sense, consumes a major portion of the resources of our societies. It is where, once we have dealt with the necessities of life such as earning a living, we choose to spend much of our time. It might therefore be fruitful to examine the modes of thinking that are brought to bear in this area and to consider their relevance to psychotherapy. I begin by examining the nature of aesthetic judgments and how these may be justified. Using clinical vignettes, I argue that many of the negative propositions that patients form of themselves and their world have the characteristics of aesthetic judgments. I then discuss some of the overlaps between aesthetics and psychotherapy as well as some recent developments in cognitive science that are of relevance to the theme of this paper.

## THE NATURE OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENTS

There are many competing and overlapping theories of the nature of art (Dickie 1997) and aesthetic experience (Matravers 2003). By one account, “aesthetics pays attention to what is not reducible to scientific cognition and is yet undeniably part of our relationship to the world” (Bowie 1990, 23). Also, “The basis of aesthetic judgment is the distinction between feelings of pleasure and non-pleasure” (Bowie 1990, 25).

This paper begins with Immanuel Kant’s thinking on aesthetic experience. This is set out in the last of his great critiques, the *Critique of Judgment* (now translated as the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*) (Kant 1790/2000). This was the first attempt to set out a systematic philosophy of aesthetics and remains highly influential (Guyer

2003). In the words of one commentator, “were it not for this work, aesthetics would not exist in its modern form” (Scruton 1982, 79). It led to Kant being described as “the father of modern aesthetics” (Schaper 1992, 368). Its subject matter is the concepts and modes of thinking that are brought to bear when aesthetic judgments are made, namely, the nature and value of aesthetic interest. Such judgments are not limited to works of art. Other objects—a mountain range or a beautiful sunset—may be the focus of an aesthetic judgment. Also, aesthetic judgment may form only part of one’s overall reaction to a work of art. In addition, one may form judgments (e.g., admiration of the technique of a painter or richness of color) that are not, in this sense, aesthetic judgments.

Kant viewed the *Critique of Judgment* as the work that unified his “critical philosophy” into a coherent whole. There is disagreement among philosophers as to whether he achieved this aim and about the overall coherence of the work (Bowie 1990, 15–40; Scruton 1982, 78–91). Nevertheless, there is general agreement that the *Critique of Judgment* offers penetrating insights into the nature of the aesthetic experience (Schaper 1992, 368; Scruton 1982, 79). I therefore focus on this latter aspect of the work and attempt to select and describe the elements that seem relevant to the practice of psychotherapy.

Kant described four salient characteristics (or “moments”) of the judgment of taste. These are (a) disinterestedness, (b) universality, (c) necessity and common sensibility, and (d) purposiveness without purpose. In addition he argued for an ethical dimension to aesthetics (that beauty is a symbol of morality).

### DISINTERESTEDNESS

A central characteristic of aesthetic judgment is that it is an emotional reaction consisting purely of the subject’s “feeling of life” (Kant 1790/2000, 204) and pleasure in contemplation of the object, and that this pleasure arises principally from beautiful form. The value that we give to the artwork resides in it alone and does not depend on external contingencies. The desires, aims, and ambitions of the observer should be

laid aside. This distinguishes the aesthetic judgment from other reactions to an artwork such as judgments of utility, the satisfaction of physiological needs such as hunger (although cookery might also be an art form) and any personal interest in the work of art (e.g., the egotistical satisfaction of owning a valuable and much-admired object). In Kant's view, "the judgment of taste is merely contemplative" (Kant 1790/2000, 209).

Kant gives primacy to the beautiful form of the art object in aesthetic judgment. He argues that other characteristics, such as color, are more idiosyncratic and "mere sensation" (Kant 1790/2000, 224). Clive Bell (1914/1997) argued that it is when we focus on form that we see the object stripped of non-aesthetic characteristics such as utility. Only then can we contemplate the object as "end in itself."

#### UNIVERSALITY

At the core of Kantian aesthetics is the seeming paradox that an aesthetic judgment is at the same time subjective and based on an emotional reaction, but also lays claim to universal assent. This expectation that others will agree with our opinions is one of the things that distinguishes aesthetic judgments from those based simply on sensory experience. If I like olives and you do not, then this is a matter of no interest, either to us or to anyone else. I do not think that I am right and you are wrong. We simply accept that a taste such as this is determined by individual differences in our experience of food or the actions of our taste buds. It would be "folly" (Kant 1790/2002, 212) to go through life announcing one's like or dislike of olives and expecting anyone to care. If, however, we disagree about the value of a film or a painting, then this may be a source of concern to us.

This claim to universality is one of the things that makes art important. The many major artistic institutions, such as art galleries and schools of art, rest, at least implicitly, on the assumption that there is more to art than a myriad of individual, subjective impressions. Events such as the Oscar awards and the many highly publicized literary and artistic prizes attest to our feeling

that there are standards of artistic judgment that can lay claim to the assent of everyone. Aesthetic judgment is not based on a concept of the object. If so, it would be possible to draw up objective standards of excellence and judge works of art against these. Similarly, the production of great art would simply be a matter of learning the rules of excellence and applying these to its creation. The reality is that no such rules have been formulated and artistic genius remains "a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given" (Kant 1790/2000, 307). No one can prove, by reference to such an objective rule, that any given book or film is better than all the others. Nevertheless, we take great interest in such judgments and in how closely they accord with our own. We assume that there is such a thing as expertise in making artistic judgments and expect that experts rise above personal preferences (e.g., a general dislike of war films) in reaching their judgments (Burnham 2000, 46–50). Our aesthetic judgments may sometimes be the subject of lengthy discussion and heated argument. Such argument is underpinned by a belief that it has the potential to lead to agreement. If we cannot agree, we may be left with doubts about our own capacity for judgment in such matters or that of the person with whom we are speaking.

#### NECESSITY AND COMMON SENSIBILITY

Kant's purpose here is to set out why it is that aesthetic judgment should elicit the agreement of others. Both universality and necessity rest on the fact that aesthetic attributes are not really properties of the object but are only described as if they were so. If I tell you that a painting cost £5000 or that it was painted in 1860, then I am describing its objective properties. If, however, I say that the painting is beautiful, then I am not in fact describing the painting at all. Instead, I am talking about myself, about the feelings that the painting evokes in me. The expectation that others will agree is based on a concept of common sensibility (Kant 1790/2000, 173–76). I expect that you will agree with my judgments because I assume that there is a perceptual and cognitive apparatus common to all human beings that de-

termines our aesthetic judgments. Kant argues that it is this common sensibility that allows the communicability of art and that such communicability is central to aesthetic judgment. “Taste is thus the faculty for judging *a priori* the communicability of the feelings that are combined with a given representation (without the mediation of a concept)” (Kant 1790/2000, 296). He argues that this communicability and the possibility of public discourse serve to regulate the judgment, “that in its reflection takes account *a priori* of everyone else’s way of representing in thought” (Kant 1790/2000, 293), and that “Beautiful art . . . promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication” (Kant 1790/2000, 306). It is this principle of intersubjectivity that underlies the claims of universality and necessity. When we discuss the aesthetic qualities of a work of art, we do not talk about it in objective terms. Instead, we discuss *how we perceive it*.

#### PURPOSIVENESS WITHOUT PURPOSE

Although a work of art may be commissioned or created for a given purpose, the realization of that purpose is not what gives the object its value as art. A rich person might have his or her portrait painted for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. However, the aesthetic value of the painting is not determined by the fulfillment of this purpose, but by other qualities of the finished product. Although an object as artwork has no purpose external to itself, its aesthetic qualities do carry an implication of intentionality. It has meaning in its own right, and not because it serves some ulterior purpose. Kant argues that this arises because the experience of beauty is created by a sense of internal harmony in the subject and “animation of its cognitive powers, thus an internal causality (which is purposive) with regard to cognition in general” (Kant 1790/2000, 222). Furthermore, it stands as a whole and cannot be analyzed in terms of a summation of its various components.

On the other hand, a work of art may be spoiled if used in the service of an external purpose. To take an imaginary example, one’s favorite classical symphony might be used as background music in an advertisement for a new model of car. If

one were repeatedly exposed to this over many months, then the association with the advertisement might ruin the experience of hearing the music in a concert hall.

This account of aesthetic judgment describes the elements that, taken together, constitute the particular way in which we respond to works of art. It has been summarized as

the idea that in a judgment of taste a person can claim intersubjective validity for the feeling of pleasure that she experiences in response to a beautiful object because that pleasure is produced, in an attitude of disinterested contemplation, not by a practical concern for utility or advantage in the possession of the object, but by the free and harmonious play of the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding that the beautiful object induces, and that she can rightly claim such validity for her feeling because we all share these cognitive faculties and they must work pretty much the same way in all of us. (Guyer 2000/1790, xvii)

#### THE ETHICAL DIMENSION OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENT

The idea that there is a link between beauty and morality goes back to classical philosophy (Halliwell 1992) and continues to appear in present-day ethical thinking (e.g., Elliot 1991). Kant offers a complex argument for such a link and argues for “beauty as the symbol of morality” (Kant 1790/2000, 351–54). He does not argue that beauty is always an expression of the good or that the two are, in some sense, one and the same thing. Instead, he argues that there are formal similarities between goodness and beauty and that some works of art “arouse sensations that contain something analogical to the consciousness of a mental state produced by moral judgments” (Kant 1790/2000, 354).

This link is commonly made when we discuss works of art. One expectation we have of art is that it will be, in some sense that is not always well defined, honest. One critic described the process of judging paintings in an art competition as follows: “I scrutinized them first for any sign of expertise or virtuosity, second for any evidence of integrity and honesty . . .” (Boyd 1998, 566). We praise art in the language of moral approbation. Beethoven’s music is described as “original,” characterized by “deep sin-



cerity” and *Fidelio* as “a symbol of love and liberty” (Westrup and Harrison 1959, 63–65). Similarly, the terms we use when we pass negative judgment on a work of art (e.g., sentimental, crude, vulgar, meretricious, self-indulgent) are the same as we use to pass negative moral judgments on people.

## CLINICAL APPLICATIONS

I begin this section with three vignettes drawn from clinical practice and then analyze them in terms of Kantian aesthetic theory.

1. A middle-aged woman is receiving therapy, in which she is attempting to deal with the consequences of severe childhood sexual abuse. She feels completely worthless. She has attempted suicide on many occasions. The therapist mentions her many important achievements to which she replies, “Yes, I see what you mean, but I still feel dirty and disgusting.”
2. A young woman is being seen as an outpatient for the treatment of moderately severe postpartum depression. She is obsessed with the idea that she is a bad mother and that her child will be taken away from her. There is no justification whatsoever for this anxiety. She has often considered killing herself, but has not gone through with this because of concern about the effect that this would have on her daughter. She has seen a psychologist for cognitive therapy, but said this of her treatment: “I felt I could see through cognitive therapy. I could see what she [the psychologist] was trying to get me to think, but it didn’t make any difference. I *know* I’m a bad mother and no-one will ever make me feel any different.”
3. A student is being seen for the treatment of anorexia nervosa. Despite being underweight she continues to complain that she is fat. The therapist shows her a body mass index chart and points out that far from being overweight she is in fact underweight. She then says, “Yes, I can see what the chart shows, but I still feel that I’m fat and revolting.”

These examples were selected to illustrate the argument of this paper, but nevertheless are familiar to anyone who deals with patients or clients undergoing psychotherapy. If the judgments of these patients are to be changed, then the first step is to discern their nature. They are clearly not based on empirical considerations of the self

as an object. If so, they would be open to refutation by contrary evidence. In the case of the anorectic patient, there is clear evidence that refutes her judgment, but this makes no difference to the strength with which her opinion is held.

When judgments are made that are not based on rational and objective assessments, then these are sometimes loosely described as being “emotional” or “subjective.” The distinction between emotional and intellectual understanding is one that has long exercised psychotherapists. Beck et al. (1979, 302) argued that “a person cannot believe anything ‘emotionally.’” Despite this, patients often say, as in the first example, that they can see the logic of a statement about themselves, but that they cannot acknowledge it at an emotional level. This distinction is sometimes described as “knowing with the head” as opposed to “knowing with the heart” or “cold” versus “hot” cognition (Teasdale 1997, 142). There is therefore a need to reconcile these observations with Beck’s objection that an emotional judgment cannot have any cognitive content. If one “knows with the heart,” then what kind of thing can be known and how does one know it? A key assertion of this paper is that Kantian aesthetics provide a resolution of this dilemma. Rather than dichotomize judgments into ones based on either rational objectivity or whimsical, emotional subjectivity, it is more illuminating to consider the examples as aesthetic judgments.

If, as Kant argues, aesthetic judgment is about the experience of beauty, then one might ask how one can begin to regard these judgments as aesthetic? O’Hear (2001), in a paper applying the Kantian analysis to modern art, argues that beauty is not a “superior prettiness,” but that it is an attractive, life-enhancing quality. Also, he states that evaluation on aesthetic grounds can signify the presence of other qualities. “After all, ugliness is an aesthetic quality, the opposite of the beautiful. And so are types of dreariness, ungainliness, clumsiness, barbarity, discordance, terror, aggression, sentimentality, exaggeration, irony and grotesquerie” (O’Hear 2001, 178). It might therefore be possible to analyze the statements of these patients in terms of Kant’s de-

scription of aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic judgment has a number of elements and the statements quoted are considered as one of the components of the judgments that these patients form of themselves.

First, they appear to combine subjectivity with universality. These judgments have their origins in the subjective emotional reaction that the patient has to herself. The language is emotive (e.g., “fat and revolting”; “dirty and disgusting”) and the statements are accompanied by powerful negative affect. At the same time, there is an assumption that the therapist and others will feel the same way about the patient as she does herself. In Kantian terms, there is a claim of universality, that is, an attempt to elicit the agreement of others. The sexual abuse survivor said, “You know what happened to me when I was a child, surely you find me disgusting?” The postnatal depression sufferer stated, “Doctor, I’m mentally ill. No-one who is mentally ill can be a good mother.” The anorectic student pinched a fold of skin and said, “But look at my thighs, can’t you see I’m fat?”

One cannot disprove that she is fat and revolting for the same reason that one cannot prove that a painting or a film is a great work of art. “Fat and revolting” has only the “as if” objectivity of the aesthetic judgment and arises from characteristics of self-as-subject rather than self-as-object.

Second, there is a clear appeal in the first and third cases to agreement on the basis of the principle of common sensibility (“... surely you find me disgusting?”; “... can’t you see I’m fat?”), that is, that the therapist will have a similar reaction as the patient to what is described. All of these patients were initially surprised and disbelieving when told that the therapist did not share the opinions that they had about themselves.

Third, there is the issue of purposiveness without purpose. The issue of the purposes or purposiveness of art bears similarities to questions of the meaning and purpose of life itself. Matisse said, “I am unable to distinguish between the feeling I have for life and my way of expressing it” (Geertz 1997, 110). No philosopher has yet

come up with an answer to the question of the meaning of life. Despite this, most of us carry on striving and living our lives as best we can. It seems that we can get by without the existence of some overarching or ulterior meaning. Life *feels* meaningful. One might say that life itself, like the work of art, has purposiveness without purpose.

In contrast, all of these patients have lives that seem to them to be meaningless and empty. Their experience of their inner world is far from harmonious. As stated, the first two patients have persistent urges to end their lives. The third has a life dominated by obsessions about her weight, body shape, and calorie intake and suffers from a condition that has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder (Crisp et al. 1992).

How might this sense of meaning or purposiveness have been lost in these patients? I pointed out that the experience of a work of art might be spoiled if it is used for a commercial or other ulterior purpose. Something similar may happen to people who are seriously exploited, abused, coerced, or in some other way used for the purposes of others. This can lead to a debased self-concept or a spoiled sense of identity. Another patient, also a victim of sexual abuse, expressed this succinctly when she said, “I’m not a person.”

The importance of disinterestedness rests on the idea that a positive view of self should include a sense of intrinsic, noncontingent human value, that is, one that does not depend on one’s value to others. In each of our examples, one finds a fragile sense of self-worth. All three patients are easily hurt by anything that connotes rejection or criticism. This absence of self-worth is a major contributor to the suicidal impulses of the first and second patients. The anorectic patient’s condition can be seen as an unending, and ultimately fruitless, attempt to win the approval of herself and others. One of the benefits of therapy, in the opinion of Carl Rogers (1957), should arise from the client being held in “unconditional positive regard” by the therapist. In the therapeutic situation, the therapist should have a stance in relation to the patient that is nonexploitative and allows the patient to feel valued for him- or herself.

A second element arises from the idea that disinterested contemplation is contemplation of beautiful form. Sassen (2003) argues that the Kantian concept of formal beauty rests on characteristics of internal coherence and unity. For example, one cannot understand or appreciate a piece of music unless components such as melody, rhythm, tempo, and orchestration work together. Some forms of art offer a combination of expressive modes (Kant 1790/2000, 325–26). In the case of dance, one would expect music and movement to form a coherent pattern. In opera, elements such as narrative, musical expression, and the visual aesthetic of stage and costume design have to be brought together in such a way as to create a sense of unity and proportion in the performance. An artistic production “works” to the extent that one can discern an overall structure and coherence.

Mental disorders share a common theme of loss of internal coherence. This is found at its worst in schizophrenia, where the idea of splitting apart or disintegration is contained in the etymology of the word itself. In the dissociative disorders, such as multiple personality disorder or fugue states, one also sees a loss of psychic unity. In patients with affective disorders, feelings of depression or elation are overwhelming and out of proportion. Other patients are troubled with too much anxiety or anger. The request for therapy is often underpinned by a wish on the part of the patient to work toward a feeling of internal coherence.

In the first two patients described, the leading symptom is depression, which seems disproportionate to any rational assessment of their present situations. The sexual abuse survivor also exhibits a breakdown of inner coherence in the form of sudden mood swings and impulsive self-destructive acts that she cannot later explain. In the anorectic patient, feelings of ugliness and disproportion are projected on to the form of her body, which she perceives as profoundly unacceptable. This leads to obsessive dieting and self-scrutiny, in the form of repeated weighing and examining her image in her mirror.

The final correspondence with Kant’s view of aesthetic judgment lies in the moral undertones

of these patients’ judgments. The sexual abuse survivor is plagued with feelings of guilt from having been involved in an incestuous relationship. She believes that she is to blame for this and also for the many other bad things that have happened to her. At heart, she believes herself to be a bad person. The woman with postpartum depression feels guilty because she is letting her daughter down. She believes that her depression is a punishment for the fact that she terminated a pregnancy in the past. The anorectic student equates her binge eating with greed and self-indulgence, the deadly sin of gluttony.

## AESTHETICS: CONVERGING TRENDS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

The overlap between the concerns of psychotherapy and the arts is large and long standing. In this section, I begin by discussing some of the general similarities between psychotherapy and the arts. I then discuss some important recent developments in psychotherapy research, which may be seen as converging on the idea that aesthetic judgment is of relevance in the psychotherapeutic discourse.

### PSYCHOTHERAPY AND AESTHETICS: GENERAL ISSUES

Study of the shared concerns of psychotherapy and the arts goes back to the earliest formulations of psychoanalysis (Higgins 1992). The overlaps and similarities between the two spheres of activity continue to generate new insights (Holmes 2002). One explanation for this may be that both psychotherapy and the arts deal with a particular combination of feeling and cognition that we call *aesthetic judgment*. Both areas are hugely complex. Their nature and boundaries are subjects of constant debate and dispute (e.g., Archer 2003). Nevertheless, it is possible to discern broad similarities.

We turn to art when we seek things such as solace, inspiration, happiness, and a sense of connection to others. In short, we use art as a form of affect regulation. Most people also approach works of art in a spirit of curiosity and with a wish to explore meaning and develop new



insights. To promote this, there is the whole panoply of art education, history, and criticism. These activities play a mediating role between the work of art and its viewers or listeners.

One task of criticism is to give us what has been described as “enabling knowledge” (Burnham 2000, 53), knowledge that provides a basis for aesthetic judgment. At a simple level, one cannot appreciate a poem without an ability to read or to understand the language in which the poem is written. On a more sophisticated level, our view of art may be enhanced by knowledge of factors such as historical and cultural context, the biography of the artist, the symbolic meaning of the content, and technical aspects of the creation of the artwork. Such information places the work of art in a number of contexts and gives us new perspectives on it.

The issue of interpretation is one where there has been considerable overlap between psychotherapy and art theory. Interpretation in the arts has generated an enormous amount of theory and controversy that cannot be summarized here (Margolis 1992). The critic Cynthia Freeland (2001, 101) has stated, “Sometimes an interpretation can even transform an experience of art from repugnance to appreciation and understanding.” A good interpretation should provide clarity, richness, and complexity to our perception of art. She illustrates this by examining a painting by the English artist, Francis Bacon. At first sight, this painting is ugly and horrifying. However, discussion of factors such as the relevance of Bacon’s life history to the painting, the use of color, the composition of the painting, its social context, and its artistic antecedents help us to see past the ugliness. Kant refers to the power of art to transform our experience of reality: “Beautiful art displays its excellence precisely by describing beautifully things that in nature would be ugly and displeasing” (Kant 1790/2000, 312).

The psychotherapist also plays a mediating role, in this case between the client and his or her symptoms. Brewin and Power (1997, 1) argue that “all psychological therapies share a commitment to transforming the meanings that clients have attached to their symptoms, relationships and life problems.” The therapist does this by

bringing his or her clinical experience and theoretical knowledge to bear on the mental content that disturbs the patient.

As noted, the belief in the universality of aesthetic judgment rests on an assumption of common sensibility. In discussing common sensibility, Kant argues that this, “in its reflection takes account *a priori* of everyone else’s way of representing in thought, in order *as it were* to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment” (Kant 1790/2000, 293–94). This indicates a need to assess to what extent one’s judgments are influenced by one’s circumstances or personal preconceptions and prejudices. This allows one to become more broadminded and to try to reflect on one’s judgments from a universal standpoint (Kant 1790/2000, 295). To do so is a skill that can be cultivated. Although Kant seems to be saying that this process need not involve any actual dialogue with others, he does not exclude the possibility that this skill might be cultivated by such communication. In his writing on other themes, such as politics, he places great emphasis on the regulative function of public discourse (Burnham 2000, 126–28).

The communication of material from patient to therapist holds this up to scrutiny. The therapist considers this in the context of his or her theoretical knowledge and clinical experience. One task of therapy is to help the patient to see how his or her self-judgments are a product of “subjective private conditions” (e.g., the experience of growing up with a critical and punitive parent) rather than ones that would meet with universal agreement.

The issue of moral meaning or purpose may loom large in therapy. Janoff-Bulman and Frantz (1997) considered the issue of meaning in the context of treating patients who have been severely traumatized. They argue that many traumatized individuals, especially those who have been subjected to abuse or torture, suffer from a collapse of their prior sense of living in a just and moral world. A large part of therapy in such

people consists of restoration of a sense of moral value in their lives.

As with “enabling knowledge” in the arts, the giving of information about the nature and origin of symptoms can sometimes make these tolerable or even lead to substantial alleviation. One example might be the severely anxious patient who “catastrophizes.” This refers to a situation in which someone places a catastrophic interpretation on bodily sensations, for example, that these signify an impending heart attack or sudden death, which in turn creates further anxiety. Other factors that may be relevant include undue focus of attention on physical sensations and the use of safety behaviors that prevent the patient learning that his or her fears are misplaced. The production, in collaboration with the patient, of an explanatory model for the production of his or her anxiety symptoms may help to alleviate these by breaking into self-perpetuating feedback loops of cognition and distressing emotion (Clark 1999).

Interpretation plays a central role in psychotherapy. This can be utilized in various ways, but has some similarities to the type of artistic interpretation described. Patients can be helped to understand symptoms when these are placed in the wider context of that person’s life history, for example, by making links between current events and traumatic situations in the past (Hackmann 1997). In psychoanalysis, a core therapeutic tactic is interpretation of the transference of thinking and feeling from past situations into the relationship with the therapist. The patient is thus helped to understand these feelings in the wider context of his or her life story. As with art criticism, the aim is not to replace judgments that are wrong with ones that are correct. Instead, the therapist should help the patient to acquire a deeper, more complex, better informed and reflective sense of self.

#### PSYCHOTHERAPY: RECENT ADVANCES

A major trend in psychotherapy in the last 30 years has been the attempt to base theory and practice on a foundation of scientific empiricism. A crucial question for the present thesis is whether or not aesthetic philosophy is compatible with

a scientific approach to therapy. Kant states that “There is neither a science of the beautiful, only a critique, nor beautiful science, only beautiful art” (Kant 1790/2000, 304). (This is not to say that science cannot attain beauty, only that beauty cannot be its justification.) Nevertheless, he adds that “. . . it has been quite rightly noted that for beautiful art in its full perfection much science is required, such as e.g. acquaintance with ancient languages, wide reading of those authors considered to be classical, history, acquaintance with antiquities etc.” and that such science constitutes the “necessary preparation and foundation for beautiful art”. In a similar way, the understanding and modification of aesthetic judgments in therapy can be enhanced by means of empirical investigation.

There is growing awareness in the psychology literature of the importance of the interaction between emotion and cognition. Damasio (1994) has argued that it is emotions that drive and shape cognition and motivated choice. This is a complex and developing area of interest and there is insufficient space here to provide a full review. Nevertheless, some of the recent thinking that is of particular relevance is summarized.

One striking theory in the present context is Teasdale’s formulation of interacting cognitive subsystems (ICS) (Teasdale 1999). In this, he distinguishes between two forms of cognition. The first of these is propositional code, which represents specific meanings and the relationships between them. The second is implicational code, which represents more generic, holistic meanings. Meanings at this level consist of the regularities, recurring themes, and interrelationships abstracted from specific experiences. Synthesis of such generic meanings is characterized by particular “senses” or “feelings,” such as self-confidence or, conversely, hopelessness. Teasdale (1997) argues that, “In relation to the self, Propositional meanings refer to aspects of the self-as-object, whereas Implicational meanings are associated with different experiences of the self-as-subject” (146). Moreover, “Meaning at this [Implicational] level is difficult to convey because it does not map directly on to language. Traditionally, attempts to convey such holistic

meanings by language have taken the form of poems, parables and stories” (145). And finally, “ICS restricts the capacity to elicit emotion to generic level meanings; more specific meanings, even if they have emotionally relevant content, cannot, themselves, elicit emotion” (148).

This raises the interesting question of the nature and content of such implicational propositions. One possibility is that these have the “as if” objectivity of the aesthetic judgment, that is, that they do not describe a concept of the object but rather the emotional impact of the object on the observer. The nature of the emotional impact (e.g., whether it is revulsion or a sense of beauty) creates attentional biases that, in turn, have an impact on how the object is perceived.

Teasdale (1997) argues that enhancement of well-being following cognitive therapy is not maintained by means of changes in negative automatic thoughts or dysfunctional attitudes. He proposes that “the task of the therapist is more like that of the poet than the prose writer” (1997, 149). One function of therapy is *decentering*, in which patients move to a wider perspective on their symptoms and problems. Instead of “being” their negative thoughts and emotions, patients are helped to “reframe” these as mental events in a wider context of awareness. There is a parallel here with art criticism, which may help us to think of a work of art in the wider contexts of history and culture. He therefore advocates attention to the form of dysfunctional thinking as well as its content. This may be done by a form of meditation that utilizes “mindful experiencing/being”, and “use of present feelings and “felt senses” as a guide to problem solution and resolution”. This echoes Kant’s description of aesthetic judgment as consisting of the emotion of pleasure created by the form of the object and the origin of this pleasure in the “harmony of the faculties” that this produces in the observer.

Greenberg and Pascual-Leone (1997) provide another example of how aesthetic judgments may be worked on in therapy. These authors propose that emotions are the primary generators of personal meaning and that personal meaning involves the self-organization and explication of one’s emotional experience. Greenberg (2004)

argues that we live in a constant process of making sense of our emotions. He proposes that emotion awareness is an important component of therapy: “Once contact with emotional experience is achieved, clients must also cognitively orient to that experience as information and explore, reflect on, and make sense of it” (2004, 9). This process of “symbolizing emotion in awareness” can be the start of a creative process in which new meanings and explanatory narratives are brought in to being. Although he does not invoke the concept of aesthetic judgment as such, reflecting on, making sense of, and symbolizing an emotional response are central to aesthetic judgment.

Holm-Hadulla (2004) places creativity at the center of therapy and describes psychotherapy as an “aesthetic structuring process” (148). He argues that we have a constant need to give shape to our feelings, thoughts, and fantasies. He describes how the material presented by the patient can initiate a creative, intuitive process in the therapist. This may, for example, lead to visual images arising in the mind of the therapist. Reflection upon these in collaboration with the patient can take forward the process of making sense of symptoms and integrating these into a coherent narrative. Finally, he proposes that therapists, as part of training, should immerse themselves in the various forms of artistic engagement with the world, in the belief that this will give them enhanced insight and receptiveness to the ways in which patients attempt to communicate meaning (Holm-Hadulla 2004, 144).

These accounts of therapy recall Kant’s view of the creative process. He describes how the work of art generates what he terms an *Aesthetic Idea*. The Aesthetic Idea is not a logical or empirical proposition. Instead, it is a “representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought i.e. concept to be adequate to it. . . .” The imagination, thus put in motion, creates “another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it” (Kant 1790/2000, 314). The Aesthetic Idea may be allusive and metaphorical and may, for example, employ visual imagery and symbolism (Kant 1790/2000, 315–16). It

gives us “a new way to think about the topic it handles, a new power of thought in dealing (*reflexively* rather than *determinately*) with that theme and its cognates, beneficial for us in the conduct of our lives and in our search for self-understanding” (italics in original) (Savile 2003 95).

With regard to the particular area of body dissatisfaction and body image distortion, described in the third example, recent research offers parallels with the present thesis. Body image appears to be a multidimensional construct. Distorted body image is well recognized in patients with eating disorders. This appears to arise more from an attitude of body dissatisfaction than from perceptual distortion (Cash and Deagle 1997).

Estimation of body size has been found to be labile and modulated by the emotional state of the individual. In particular, induction of negative affect has been shown to have a negative influence on body size estimation (Williamson et al. 2002). In addition, body dissatisfaction may be magnified by cultural context, especially the currently fashionable propagation of the “thin-ideal” body-shape for women (Tiggeman 2002). In individuals who have been sexually abused, negative body image may arise, at least in part, because body image is contaminated by disgust and moral repugnance for what happened (Fallon and Ackard 2002). A moral element is also present in some patients with anorexia nervosa, who equate thinness with virtues such as self-discipline and abstinence (Garner 2002).

Some of the treatments used for disturbed body image also support the idea that what we are dealing with here is negative aesthetic judgment. Posavac et al. (2001) showed that women could be protected from the adverse effects of thin-ideal images by brief interventions that helped them to become more critical consumers of media images. Others have used experiential therapies that mobilize artistic experience to achieve change (Rabinor and Bilich 2002). Dance and music therapy can improve body awareness and enhance body satisfaction. Art therapy, for example, drawing or sculpting the body, can help patients to explore and express feelings about their bodies.

In summary, there is a growing interest in how emotion and cognition interact and the implications of this interaction for psychotherapy. Some influential researchers are invoking concepts such as art, creativity, symbolism, and culture as a way of achieving a deeper understanding of these areas. These developments appear to be converging on the idea that aesthetic judgment is a central component of self-experience.

## THE ORIGINS OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

The concept of aesthetic judgment was derived from consideration of how we respond to works of art. In this paper, this concept has been applied to how we feel and think about ourselves. Janaway (2003), in an essay on Kantian aesthetics, argues that aesthetic judgment is “a capacity contained in the very fabric of human mentality” (69). There would be no impetus to develop an interest in the higher reaches of art if there were not some prior predisposition to, and investment in, aesthetic experience. If one accepts this view it seems unlikely that aesthetic judgment developed primarily as a way of responding to art.

Geertz (1997, 112) describes works of art as follows: “They materialize a way of experiencing; bring a particular cast of mind out into the world of objects, where men can look at it”. Gelernter (2002) argues that a painting or sculpture is “an energy source, like a charged battery or compressed spring. It absorbs energy from the artist and radiates it back to the looker”. Burnham (2000, 66), in his commentary on the *Critique of Judgment*, states, “human beings—either in themselves or in the society and history in which they live and grow but also help to form—act very much like art works. Humans strive to realize the ideal, to create themselves as fully or legitimately human.”

On this interpretation, art can be seen as an externalization of the world of inner experience. Beautiful form may be the symbol of internal coherence and unity. One might propose that one way in which we know ourselves is by that combination of emotion, cognition, purposive-

ness, coherence, and ethical value defined by Kant as aesthetic judgment. This had its origins in self-perception and became applied to works of art to the extent that these are external representations of inner experience. Apprehension of art and apprehension of self are therefore one and the same thing. Self-awareness may be the original aesthetic experience.

## CONCLUSIONS

The distinction between emotional and intellectual judgments has been a long-standing preoccupation of psychotherapists. It might be more illuminating to replace the concept of emotional thinking with that of aesthetic judgment. Many of the judgments that we form of ourselves have the characteristics of aesthetic judgments and these are often encountered in psychotherapy. Aesthetic philosophy clarifies the nature of the relationship between emotion and content in such judgments, by drawing attention to the distinction between self-as-subject and self-as-object in this context. It provides a philosophical framework that links negative judgment of the self, feelings of guilt and shame, loss of inner harmony, and a diminished or absent sense of purpose and meaning. The application of this to psychotherapy offers new ways of thinking about the processes of therapeutic change.

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