Judging Appearances: A Phenomenological Study of the Kantian sensus communis
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Edward Eugene Kleist: Judging Appearances: A Phenomenological Study of the Kantian *sensus communis*. Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers 2000. x + 158 pages. ISBN 1-4020-0258-0.

Judging Appearances is a carefully crafted work that mounts a petite gemstone (a selective interpretation of §§ 1–22 of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*) onto a ring of historical development dating back to ancient philosophers. The interpretive tools Kleist uses to cut this otherwise rough diamond (Kant's account of the four "moments" in his Analytic of the Beautiful) are taken from the phenomenological standpoint. In hopes of presenting the textual gem in such a way that its aesthetic value may be more readily appreciated, the author's historical setting focuses mainly on the writings of Leibniz and on Kant's own earlier aesthetic writings. The theme Kleist takes to be paramount is that of the *sensus communis*: for Kant, he argues, our experience of beauty is rooted in "the harmony of diverse human perspectives" (4) adopted by human beings who find their "dwelling place among a human plurality in the sharing of perspectivally situated voices".

That Kleist sees Kant's aesthetics as rooted in Leibniz is no accident, given his self-confessed adoption of a phenomenological standpoint, for Husserl himself adopted Leibnizian language (cf. 4–5). Kleist's introductory chapter portrays his whole book as an attempt to read Kant through the eyes of Husserl. One side-effect of this approach is that the author frequently makes statements that claim to be about Kant's theories, supported by little or no explanation or argument, even though the terms being used are quite foreign to Kant's text. A typical example comes when he refers to "Kant's [...] method of phenomenological reduction" (3), when that *name* for the method is Husserl's, not Kant's. Likewise (11), "Kant's own descriptive treatment [...] isolates (through a series of reductions) the subject's power of making judgments of taste". Many similar claims are made about Kant's supposed use of other phenomenological terms, such as "neutralization" (e.g., 16). Such claims will make little sense to anyone who does not already understand the phenomenological theories taken for granted throughout the book.

Chapter II presents a "phenomenological reconstruction" of the four "moments" in Kant's aesthetic theory, portraying the *sensus communis* as the a priori principle of all judgment. The first moment, "disinterestedness", establishes a "neutralization of the cognitive" (17) that "sets free the resemblance seeking [...] of the imagination." The second moment, "subjective universality", establishes that the type of resemblance being sought in such free play "is not a relation between (*inter*) individuals as personal subjects" (17), but rather, the judging person's relation to "the entire sphere of *judging persons*" (18). By suspending any reliance on what is objective (the categories or the moral law), this moment insures aesthetic judgments will be characterized by "openness to appearance" (19) and so also by "openness to the human plurality" (22). Kleist interprets these first two moments as constituting two types of phenomenological reduction: conative and cognitive, respectively (30–31). This prepares the way for the third moment, "purposiveness without a purpose", where any approach to beauty relying on some ingrained *purpose* within the object (such as Plato's) is rejected. Rather than the "good" or the "perfect" nature of the object being the basis for judgment, Kant's "purposiveness" lays the emphasis purely on the judgment's *form*. The key feature of this form, Kleist argues, is

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the special form of causality (or "auto-affection") Kant calls "contemplation" (38–39). This focus on what is "essentially non-actual" (i.e., on purposiveness *rather than* purpose) gives rise to *pleasure* because "it requires openness to the surprise of pure appearance" (40). Such judgments take on aesthetic significance to the extent they reflect a grounding in this *shared* world of appearance – i.e., in the *sensus communis* (42). Kant's fourth moment, "exemplary necessity", then secures this grounding by requiring the aesthetic judgment to be "uniquely my own" (i.e., not merely aping someone else's judgment), such that it serves as a *necessary example* to my "community of taste" (46), showing one of the many ways to be surprised by appearances.

Chapter III explores a theme that was only hinted in the first two chapters: the grounding of Kant's theory in Leibniz's account of pre-established harmony. Kleist begins by showing how Kant, even in his early, pre-Copernican writings, transformed Leibniz's principle of *sufficient* reason into a principle of "determining" reason (49). One of Kant's chief advances was to distinguish between two types of determination: "logical opposition" and "real opposition". While the principle of noncontradiction governs all logical opposition, Kant fully recognized by the time he wrote the first *Critique* that real opposition, as the realm governed by the principle of determining reason, "requires sensibility as a condition of the possibility of experience" (52). Much of this chapter traces Kant's various applications and modifications of Leibniz's principle, from the third Antinomy and the Ideal of Pure Reason, through various moral and political writings, to the third *Critique*. In the latter Kant introduced a "*discursive* perspectivism" that attempts to overcome the "perceptual perspectivism" implied by Leibniz's doctrine of pre-established harmony (70); for on Kant's view, there is a fundamental *in*determinacy that lies at the very foundation of aesthetic judgment. "The freedom of taste", for Kant (72), "is a *freedom in appearance.*" Whereas in the first two *Critiques* the understanding stands in a determinate relation to sensibility or the will, respectively, in the third *Critique* these faculties are governed by the indeterminacy of imagination. Thus the *schema* (a conceptual and determinate concept) must be replaced by the *example* (grounded in the indeterminacy of appearance): "the freedom of the imagination [...] means 'freedom from' conceptual determination" (75). This leads to one of the key insights in Kleist's entire study (79): the idea of the "common sense" (*sensus communis*) that Kant portrays as *regulating* all aesthetic judgment cannot perform this function "ahead of time as something with which to compare my taste, because if it did the judgment would be determinative; rather, the standard must emerge within the judgment itself". This suggests the idea of *aesthetic freedom*, and explains why the older, established generation of judges is often unable to appreciate radically new works of art: *"no existing taste is adequate to carry out the comparison necessary to elevate one's own taste to the level of the exemplary."*

Kant attempted to explain the paradoxes of aesthetic judgment (e.g., that it is universally valid, yet wholly indeterminate) by appealing to a "supersensible substrate" underlying the *sensus communis*. In the first *Critique*, the indeterminacy of appearances is transformed into the determinacy of *phenomena* (i.e., objects of experience) by the determining powers of the human subject (space, time, and the categories). *Somehow*, aesthetic judgment requires us to recognize harmony (or purposiveness) *without* depending on our own subjective determination. Yet how can we

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allow ourselves to be surprised by appearances and yet acknowledge these very appearances to be grounded in a common sense? "The key", Kleist argues (88), lies in our openness to "the givenness of feeling". Recognizing that "the diversity of the actual exceeds human understanding" (90), the person who engages in aesthetic contemplation must "view appearance without rigidified constructions". Leibniz solved this paradox of aesthetic judgment through his appeal to God as the grounding for pre-established harmony between the unique perspectives of all human monads. Kant also solved it with an emphasis on perspective, but with conceptual rather than perceptual orientation (93–94): in our contemplation of appearances, we must somehow unite two complementary maxims, "think for yourself" (so that our judgment might become an example to all others) and "think from the standpoint of everyone else" (in order to establish the reality of the *sensus communis*).

Chapter IV attempts to confirm how Kant prefigured phenomenology. It begins by describing the significance Kant gave to sensibility, raising it to the new level of "feeling" in the third *Critique*. What Kleist conveniently neglects to emphasize here is how very *different* this approach is from that of Leibniz. Instead, he skirts around it with a discussion of *similarities* between *Shaftesbury* and Leibniz. The rest of this chapter consists of largely repetitive excursions into the loosely associated themes of representation, imagination, intuitive understanding, and contemplation. While Kleist does come up with some neat insights, this chapter is so annoyingly repetitive, and (like much of the book) uses such torturously difficult sentence structure, that the overall thrust of the argument is very difficult to follow. Numerous rather unfortunate editing/typesetting errors, some quite serious, also do not help in this regard.

This book is not appropriate for readers who have no previous background in phenomenological jargon. The author never explains many key terms, such as "reduction", "*epochê*", or "bracketed", but merely assumes the reader knows what they mean. This, together with Kleist's frustrating writing style, detracts little from the immense contribution this book makes to the rather narrow field of *phenomenological* Kant studies. But for Kant studies in general, the book is of less importance. Indeed, perhaps its worst shortcoming is that the author's primary question of lasting import – whether Kant's appeal to the supersensible in explaining the role of aesthetic judgments is legitimate – is begged from the very outset (13–14): because such a reference constitutes a "retreat from the rigor of his phenomenological analysis", Kleist's brief concluding chapter simply dismisses it as a strategic error on Kant's part. Kant's intention must have been to root aesthetic contemplation in "the *sensus communis*, rather than a divine principle" (142); yet for Kant himself, the former is surely not incompatible with the idea of a supersensible grounding. Here Kleist shows his true colors: he is primarily interested not in what phenomenology can do for Kant but in what Kant can do for phenomenology. At any point where Kant parts company with a phenomenological standpoint, Kleist, in his attempt to cut the rough stone of Kant's text into a more beautiful gem, parts company with Kant.

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