

Relationship between the sublime and the beautiful philosophy essay



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Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten is a very significant figure in the philosophy of aesthetics, as he invented the word 'aesthetic' as we know it in the modern day. Baumgarten defined aesthetics thus creating a science of taste. Initially, in his first critique, the Critique of Pure Reason (1781), Kant rejected Baumgarten's account that aesthetic judgement is a form of taste.

However, in the Critique of Judgement (1790), it is evident that Kant changed his mind, as it can be seen in his third critique that he indeed was influenced by Baumgarten, as he says that aesthetic judgement is a judgement of taste.

This essay will begin by looking into a general account of Kant's view on aesthetics, which will lead to examining his third critique - the Critique of Judgement - looking at the first book: Analytic of the Beautiful, of the first section: Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement, of Part I: Critique of Aesthetic Judgement. This will then lead to what Kant describes as the four moments of aesthetic judgement - 'disinterestedness', 'universality', 'purposiveness' and 'necessity'. The essay will then discuss Kant's notion of the sublime, looking at the main difference between beauty and the sublime and the types of sublime. This will then lead to the relationship between the sublime and the beautiful according to Kant and then will conclude by examining some criticisms of Kant's aesthetic judgement.

For Kant, there are two forms of the aesthetic - the beautiful and the sublime. Although, Kant's Critique of Judgement (CoJ) is the main source of his view on aesthetics, he also published another work on the topic in 1764 - Observations on Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime, however, this is considered to be more interested in psychology rather than aesthetics (Kelly,

1998: 27). Douglas Burnham states in his book *An Introduction to Kant's The* aesthetic judgement is the focal point in Kant's third critique. It can be found that he began looking at judgement in the

Aesthetic judgements are essentially judgements of taste according to Kant. 'The judgement of taste is aesthetic' (Kant, 1790 in Cahn and Meskin, 2008: 131). When he says judgements of taste, he does not mean taste in sense of eating, but taste in the sense of whether someone has good or bad taste in something. There are four aspects of taste, which are as follows: 'quality', 'quantity', 'relation of the purpose' and 'satisfaction of the object'. These four aspects through which Kant expresses his aesthetic judgments are known as his 'Four Moments', which are most commonly known as:

1. Disinterest
2. Universality
3. Purposiveness
4. Necessity.

Kant describes aesthetic judgements firstly as 'disinterested', saying that it only disinterested pleasure that can ground aesthetic judgements. There are three types of satisfaction in 'disinterest' - the agreeable, the beautiful and the good. The agreeable is subjective and so not universal; the beautiful is subjective yet demands that others agree and the good is objective but is based on concepts. Kant argues that it is only in the beautiful that we can be free and disinterested (Wenzel, 2005: 142). Kant begins his account of disinterestedness by defining what interest is - '). There are two types of interest - one is by sensation (in the agreeable) and the other by concepts (in the good). Sensation has got to do with the existence of a thing. When something exists we can feel it - this is a common notion for everyone as we

all say if we can feel ourselves pinching ourselves then we are not dreaming - it is real (Burnham, 2000: 51).

Burnham (ibid: 52) goes on to say that ' . This is indeed a Kantian claim, as Kant's notion of disinterest is that of dismissing any interest when judging a thing beautiful. Aesthetic judgements are free from such interests. To be disinterested when judging art, means that interest is and as mentioned before, free from interest. Pure aesthetic judgements are unconcerned with the real existence of the object (Crowther, 2007: 68). Disinterest is at its most basic definition, an attempt to judge something beautiful, however remaining impartial while doing so. Kant talks about pleasure throughout his account of the beautiful, and to judge something aesthetically, a person is gaining a pleasure in something that they are disinterested in. Something must exist for it to be judged aesthetically, however, the judgement itself is a mental experience. As Burnham (2000: 52) says, it is the thing itself that is being judged, through the experiencing of it. This again is reminiscent of Kant's notion of the thing in itself in his transcendental philosophy.

(Kant, 1790 in Cahn and Meskin, 2008: 134). The second of Kant's ' Four Moments' is that of ' universality'. Kant claims that in being disinterested about pleasure if the beautiful object, one can claim universal validity to judgement. As can be seen from the quote above, Kant says that a judgement is universal ' apart from concepts' (ibid). ' Universality' is not based on any concepts. If the judgement has concepts then it is suggesting that beauty is the property of the object (which it often is expressed as) that is being judged and this is not the case. Kant argues that subjective judgements are not universal, for example, if I said that the taste of <https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-the-sublime-and-the-beautiful-philosophy-essay/>

chocolate pleases me and somebody else said that they did not like chocolate, then both of these are individual responses and both are correct. I do not expect everybody to like chocolate; neither does the other person think that everyone will not like chocolate just because they do not like it. Thus, subjective judgements are not universal. Objective judgements are universal, however. Taking chocolate as an example once more, if one was to say that chocolate was sweet - in relation to it containing a lot of sugar - and another person said it is not, then it is evident that they are not aware of what the other meant; as it is a universal fact that chocolate is sweet (again in relation to it being full of sugar) (Burnham, 2000: 46-47). Therefore, aesthetic judgements are like objective judgments in the fact that they are both universal. However, being sweet is a property of chocolate and beauty according to Kant, is not a property of any object. Kant overcomes this obstacle of beauty becoming a property of the object by using 'as if'. Kant acknowledges that each individual has their own taste, however, he states that and as mentioned earlier, judging the beautiful is a different story. Following on from saying that each person has their own taste, he says that:

This is a notion he repeats throughout defining and explaining 'universality' (in *ibid*: 134-135) and it is how he surmounts the idea of beauty being a property of an object - he says it is 'as if' it is a property of an object, not actually the property of the object! So to sum up 'universality', when someone is judging something to be beautiful, they expect that when making this judgement, that when it is judged by others, they are expected to judge it beautiful also and gain pleasure in it (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005).

Kant's third moment is that of 'purposiveness' (or 'finality' or 'end', as Kant uses in his CoJ). Kant defines this moment There are three types of purpose: external, definite and internal. External purpose is if the purpose does what it is supposed to do. Definite purpose is what the purpose is meant to do and internal purpose is what the purpose is meant to be like. In this moment, Kant is trying to portray that things are judged to be beautiful if they are perceived to have a purpose, but not a particular purpose - otherwise, the beautiful is something that is purposiveness without purpose. Kant is keeping with the 'no concept' (from 'universality') here as the purpose of an object is the concept to which it was manufactured (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005). An example of this third moment would be that of nature. Beauty in nature appears to be purposive, however it is of no use to us and it is for this reason that the beauty of nature is pleasurable to us (ibid).

The fourth and final of Kant's 'Four Moments', is that of 'necessity'. The following is how Kant describes the importance of 'necessity' in his CoJ:

Satisfaction of encountering a beautiful object is what Kant calls a necessary pleasure and hence ('universality' coming into play again here) a pleasure of all perceivers of it. Aesthetic judgements must be necessary according to Kant. Along with 'necessity' comes common sense, however, Kant does not mean common sense in the normal everyday meaning of the phrase, he means the actual senses that we all have (Burnham, 2000: 55) - taste, touch, hearing, sight and smell. Hence, the sense of pleasure that one gets from judging something beautiful is that common sense. 'Necessity' is again linked to 'universality' in that the 'as if' concept comes into play again in his fourth moment. 'As if' in 'necessity' is linked to that of the condition of '<https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-the-sublime-and-the-beautiful-philosophy-essay/>

necessity'. The condition of 'necessity' is what it is saying about the people who are judging an object beautiful. As Burnham (2000: 57) states,

For Kant, the beautiful is not the only form of the aesthetic - the other is the sublime. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (year: 1214), It is this '...awe...' that differentiates the beautiful from the sublime. The sublime is something that is beyond beauty. Kant defines the sublime as . Kant divides the sublime into two types - the mathematical and the dynamical' (ibid)). The mathematical is concerned with when we encounter vast, extensive, large objects - size is the key component here - we cannot get our heads around something that is so monumentally extensive. Because of its size, we cannot grasp it sensibly and so it brings about a terror within us. We cannot take it all in at once so it becomes too overwhelming (Burnham, 2000: 91). It contains feelings of exhilaration and being overwhelmed. Take the example of a violent storm; if I am frightened by the storm, this inevitably leads to an interest in saving myself. Once I have expressed an interest, then I cannot experience the sublime as the sublime, like the beautiful, involves 'disinterestedness'. It is so great in size that we cannot comprehend it as it almost becomes so vast that our imagination runs away with itself (McCloskey, 1987: 98). The dynamical sublime relates to power. It concerns our experience of the mighty, the powerful, dangerous objects or phenomena which we regard from a position of safety. Take again the example of a violent storm - a natural disaster. When we see something like this violent storm we know that it can crush and overpower us, however, we as rational beings can summon up enough moral courage to resist the terror and fear that the storm gave rise to. Summoning up this moral courage is something that only

a rational being can do. Because we are experiencing the storm from a safe distance, we know that we are safe so that interest of saving ourselves does not exist and thus we can experience the sublime.

For Kant, the sublime is essentially something we experience (influence of Heidegger here). The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog by Caspar David Friedrich, is probably the best painting that represents Kant's idea of the sublime. As can be seen below, Friedrich used nature to portray the sublime. The painting illustrates a man standing alone, looking out onto vast scenery of thick fog covering a mountain range, observing it from a position of safety - suggests that this image is that of the dynamical sublime.

Kant begins his Analytic of the Sublime (Book II of The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement) with the similarities between the beautiful and the sublime. What can be seen first is evident - both are aesthetic judgements. Both involve disinterested pleasure; that is when making an aesthetic judgement, the person judging must remain impartial while judging the object beautiful; the sublime - in the case of dynamical sublime, taking the example of the storm again, when experiencing the storm from a safe distance where the person knows no harm can be done to themselves, they can view the sheer effect that the storm is having and thus experience the sublime. Both the beautiful and the sublime also have a universal aspect to them - the force of the storm and looking at its impact from afar, should indeed have the same effect on everyone. However, it can be established that the third 'moment' - 'purposiveness' is not in common to the two types of the aesthetic. As

Burnham (2000: 90) mentions, Kant describes pleasure in the introduction to the CoJ, as 'However, the sublime does not allow an achievement of an end. <https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-the-sublime-and-the-beautiful-philosophy-essay/>

Kant's aesthetics has been criticised by many a philosopher since. Gadamer (who was highly influenced by Heidegger) criticised that Kant's aesthetics was ultimately subjectivist. Gadamer stresses that Kant's aesthetics is not linked to a proper knowledge. Gadamer says that Kant limits his aesthetic judgement to mere experience of the pleasurable. He says that by limiting our experience through the 'four moments', it does not challenge us enough in making the judgements[1]. Many critics have also tried to criticise Kant on what disinterested pleasure actually is. It has also been criticised that Kant's notion of the aesthetic judgement say nothing about art as a developing concept.

This essay has examined Kant's 'four moments' of aesthetic judgement of the beautiful, looking at aesthetic judgements as being made by a person who must remain impartial and not interested in the object of judgement; seeing all aesthetic judgements as 'universal', that is that if an aesthetic judgement is made then everyone will agree. Each aesthetic judgement is made with purposive but without an end in sight and all aesthetic judgements are necessary. It has then gone on to discuss the sublime, looking at the two types of sublime - the mathematical and the dynamical; the mathematical concerning that which is so extensive in size, it overcomes us and the dynamical being that we are observing something very powerful from a position of safety and so are able to experience the sublime. The essay then looks into the relationship that the sublime and the beautiful have by looking at the similarities and differences that are in each; similarities being that they are both forms of the aesthetic, they are both reflective judgements, they both involve 'disinterestedness' and are both '

universal'. This essay has concluded by looking at a few criticisms of Kant's aesthetics looking at Gadamer (and Heidegger) who thought that Kant's view on the aesthetic was too subjectivist and has also looked at how Kant's aesthetics shows nothing of how art in the aesthetic judgement as a developing concept. It is evident that Kant indeed influenced many aesthetic philosophers after him as his aesthetic theory can be seen in many a philosopher of art since then, both of influence and criticism.