

BEAUTY, NECESSITY AND THE A PRIORI

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Two doctrines of importance in Kant's aesthetics are that judgments of taste are synthetic a priori and that the beautiful is the object of a necessary delight. For one reason or another commentators have tended to neglect them, though how unmerited this neglect is can be appreciated only by doing a fair amount of exegetical labour. My hope here is that by digging away at this piece of history we may eventually learn what to say on our own account, and emerge at the end with truths whose interest is independent of their Kantian provenance.

1. I say that there are two doctrines here, but it is easy to think that in reality just one thought is expressed in two different ways. For one thing, Kant is notoriously lax in his use of his technical terms, and the words "a priori" and "necessary" are often used by him interchangeably. Second, if we attempt to read "a priori" in its official, epistemic, sense, the claim that a judgment to the effect that a particular object is beautiful is synthetic but can be known true independently of experience, is plainly false. Charity requires us not to commit Kant to such a wrongheaded belief. Last, Kant explicitly says (*Critique of Judgment*, § 37.2) "A judgment to the effect that it is with pleasure that I perceive and estimate some object is an empirical judgment. But if it asserts that I think the object beautiful, i.e. that I may attribute the delight to everyone as necessary, it is then an *a priori* judgment." Here it appears that the a priori nature of the judgment is explained in terms of its alleged necessity. Assimilating the one to the other, the a priori to the necessary, avoids the falsity of the official reading and has the virtue of respecting Kant's own words. (Cp also § 36.4)

However, immediately we look at the detail of the aesthetic version of Kant's general critical problem, namely, How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?, we cannot fail to notice that it differs

significantly from its non-aesthetic peers. What Kant is concerned with in the Third Critique is not with our absolute need to think in terms of the concept *beauty*, as we must with the concepts of space and time and with the pure concepts of the understanding, but with our ability legitimately to assert that others will respond in a particular way to an object on the sole basis of our own subjective reaction to it. As he writes at § 36.3,

We may put the problem in this way: How is a judgment possible which, going merely upon the individual's own feeling of pleasure in an object independent of the concept of it, estimates this as a pleasure attached to the representation of the same object *in every other individual*, and does so *a priori*, i.e. without being allowed to wait and see if other people will be of the same mind ?

This quite atypical reading of the notion of apriority is not just stray. It echoes an earlier passage, at § 32.3, where Kant asserts

Besides, every judgment which is to show the taste of the individual is required to be an independent judgment of the individual himself. There must be no need of groping about among other people's judgments and getting previous instruction from their delight in or aversion to the same object. Consequently his judgment should be given out *a priori* and not as an imitation relying on the general pleasure a thing gives as a matter of fact.

These passages have to be taken fully seriously if we are to understand what Kant takes to be *the* main problem of aesthetics, and to do that makes the assimilation of the doctrine of apriority to that of necessity quite impossible. If we are concerned with necessity, we are in one way or another concerned with the *content* of the judgment of taste; if we are concerned with apriority, we are concerned with the *grounds* on which that content is advanced. To assimilate the latter concern to the former prevents Kant's question from arising. It also needlessly obscures his doctrine of necessity. Keeping them apart does neither. It has the further virtue of aligning the issue of apriority with considerations of epistemology, as the official terminology requires, and aligning the issue of necessity with matters semantic.

2. One thing that gets in the way of clarity is a pervasive misunderstanding, regrettably encouraged by Kant himself, of just what a judgment of taste is. Commentators have universally identified it with the assertion or the proposition that an individual object is beautiful. Having done that they naturally enough see everything that Kant says about the judgment of taste as elucidatory of its content. Hence one source of the temptation to explain its apriority in terms of its necessity. However, since Kant is insistent that in a judgment of taste "we refer the representation to the Subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (§1.1), reflection on the fact that I may sometimes judge something to be beautiful without experience of it — as I may judge Helen from reading Homer, of this month's playmate from perusal of *Playboy's* centre fold — should convince us that the traditional identification is mistaken. There are hosts of judgments that something is beautiful that are not judgments of taste. Those are just two.

Accurately speaking, for Kant, a judgment of taste is a judgment to the effect that something is beautiful made on the basis of the subject's own disinterested experience of that thing¹. Consequently not everything said about the judgment of taste has to be taken as qualifying its content, which of course is no different from the content of any other judgment that something is beautiful. Instead we can interpret some of Kant's claims about it as informative about the kind of ground on which such a judgment is most usually and most securely to be made. A case in point is the assertion that the judgment of taste is a priori.

To see what this comes to, recall the content that Kant assigns to the judgment that something is beautiful, whether or not it is propounded on grounds that constitute it one of taste. Setting aside for the moment all matters of necessity, Kant's doctrine can be put perspicuously (if rather anachronistically) by saying that the judgment's truth-condition is that everyone who disinterestedly contemplates the object finds delight in it. Obviously that something is beautiful cannot be known a priori in the sense that it is something that we can come to know independently of experience altogether. Either we have to see the object for ourselves, or, perhaps, seek the advice of a reliable judge, or undertake a little market research to decide whether in fact everyone who views the object in the right disinterested frame of mind does experience the requisite favourable response. All these routes require experience, and there being no other that dispenses with it, it is false in the strict and official under-

standing of the term that the judgment is synthetic a priori. This is true whether the thought is advanced on grounds that constitute it a judgment of taste or not.

However, as we saw, in §§ 32, 36, Kant offers us a different understanding of “a priori”. The judgment of taste is a priori in that it propounds the thought whose content is elucidated in terms of a universal claim about people’s delight in the object on the sole basis of the subject’s own pleasure in confronting that object. It is a priori in that it pretends to knowledge of the universal claim without needing external verification of it. Understood in this way, the doctrine of the judgment of taste’s apriority is philosophically uncontroversial. It turns out not to be a substantive claim at all. Rather it is definitional of the concept *judgment of taste* itself. It is an entirely different matter whether we can do without judgments of taste in our aesthetic discourse — a question Kant quite properly answers in the negative —, and a different matter again whether judgments of taste can ever be justified —, which, of course, he answers in the affirmative. As far as the present claim goes, to speak in Kantian terms, it is just an analytic matter, and a stipulative one at that, that the judgment of taste is a priori.

Nothing else need be said about apriority. It may, however, serve a purpose to underscore the difference between the usual Kantian claim that a judgment is synthetic a priori in nature and the present doctrine that the judgment of taste is so. Nowhere else, so far as I am aware, is such an assertion pinned to a particular set of grounds on which a thought of a certain kind is paradigmatically judged.² In all other contexts such a doctrine is indissolubly linked to the content of the thought that is alleged to enjoy this status. Once we spot this asymmetry between the question “How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?” as it appears in aesthetics and as it appears in general philosophy, the unity of the overall Critical endeavour cannot remain entirely undisturbed. That is a matter for Kantian scholarship though and not my present concern. What is important here, and what we need to take away from this part of the discussion, is the sharp distinction between the content of a judgment and the grounds on which it may need standardly to be advanced. Neglecting this distinction we run the risk of propounding falsehoods in aesthetics instead of truths.

3. Turning now to the more complex and challenging issue of necessity proper, we may forget all about the preferential standing of the judgment of taste and concentrate on the content of its

judgment, the judgment that something is beautiful. It will assist greatly for what follows to present Kant's proposals and variations on them in a standardly regimented form, and I shall use only well-known forms of notation to do so. In case there be readers unfamiliar with the symbolism I employ I shall always offer a reading of displayed formulae in (rather stilted) English in the text itself, or else at foot of page, signalled in the text by asterisks.

The analytical suggestion I have alluded to as offering the truth-condition of the judgment that something is beautiful has the structure of (1) :

$$(1) (x)(\text{Beautiful } x \text{ iff } (y)(\text{Disinterestedly contemplates } \langle y, x \rangle, \text{ Pleases } \langle x, y \rangle),$$

which reads in English, "for all x , x is beautiful if and only if for all y such that y disinterestedly contemplates x , x pleases y ." (In future displays I shall use letters 'B', 'DC' and 'P' as obvious abbreviations.)

Were one to look in the *Critique* for an utterance that comes maximally close to this thought, the summary statement of the elucidation (*Erklärung*) of the beautiful at the end of §9 would serve well³. "The beautiful is that which, apart from a concept, pleases universally". Necessity apart, this, I believe, offers us what Kant sees as the *complete* analysis of the beautiful, so if we are to find a way of joining up his thought about necessity with the analysis it is somewhere here that a place has to be found for it.

There will no doubt be those who protest: this can't be all that goes into the analysis, for no mention is made here of those central features of Kant's discussion of the beautiful that so mark him out from his predecessors, that is, the harmony of the faculties in free play, the projective finality of the beautiful and its extension to considerations of form alone. That of course is quite correct. But I contend that in addition to offering us an *analysis* of the concept, Kant also offers us a *specification* of the (subjectively described) sort of thing that the analysis is going to be able to apply to, and that it is in the course of his elaborating this specification that these topics make their appearance; they do *not* belong within the analysis itself. That might hold good absolutely, while the specification of the kind of things we can find beautiful may be limited by considerations that are peculiar to human psychology. However the detail here may be, it will follow from my hypothesis that necessity will be connected with the beautiful entirely independently of the interesting but subsidiary information Kant provides about what we

shall identify as beautiful and about just where our aesthetic pleasures may extend.

At the start I said that Kant's doctrine has been undeservedly neglected. Certainly one reason for this neglect lies with an apparent difficulty in finding a natural place in the analysis for the notion of necessity plausibly to lie. This difficulty is particularly pressing when the necessity is regarded as fundamentally *de dicto* in nature, and when there seem at most to exist these three possibilities :

- (2) $\Box((x) \text{ Beautiful } x \text{ iff } (y)(DC\langle y,x\rangle, \text{ Pleases } \langle x,y\rangle))$ *
 (3) $(x) \text{ Beautiful } x \text{ iff } \Box((y)(DC\langle y,x\rangle, \text{ Pleases } \langle x,y\rangle))$ *
 (4) $(x) \text{ Beautiful } x \text{ iff } ((y)(DC\langle y,x\rangle, \Box \text{ Pleases } \langle x,y\rangle))$ *

Evidently the first of these is believed by Kant. But since it expresses only the necessity *of* the analysis — it merely binds the whole of (1) with the sentence operator '□' — and not any necessity *within* the analysis, it is not able to record what Kant asserts at the end of the Fourth Moment of the Judgment of Taste, if that is regarded as being anything more than a repetition of the claim to universality enunciated in the Second Moment. (The Fourth Moment, remember, is that of Modality, and ends : "The beautiful is that which, apart from a concept is cognized as object of a *necessary* delight.")

Yet of the three, it is at most (2) that is true. The others are clearly false, and it is perhaps for this reason that one commentator has recently claimed that the doctrine of necessity is practically indistinguishable from the doctrine of universality⁴. How wrong this is, we shall in due course see. For the moment though, consider (3) and (4). (3) cannot be correct because if it asserts something that is true, objects that are beautiful could not have failed to please those who come to contemplate them disinterestedly. No natural object enjoys that property, as we can see from reflecting that anything that we find beautiful and whose contemplation gives us delight might, had circumstances been different, have had a structure which left us cold or which repelled the eye. And no handsome man or beautiful woman will ever think it other than his or her good fortune

*Read (2) as "It is necessary that for all x, x is beautiful if and only if it pleases all disinterested observers", (3) as "For all x, x is beautiful if and only if it is necessary that it pleases all necessary observers", and (4) as "For all x, x is beautiful if and only if, for anyone who disinterestedly observes x, it is necessary that x pleases him".

to bring exceptionless delight to their companions. Not even Narcissus would insist on more. As for (4), surely closest to Kant's way of speaking, that would only be true if beautiful objects could not have failed to please the disinterested observers who actually come across them. Yet no one is logically bound to encounter in his life the objects that he does, and the truth about beauty must avoid suggesting otherwise.

While hoping eventually to capture something approaching the necessity of (4), the defender of Kant, of whom in a fashion I am one, will acknowledge that these are observations he must accept. Perhaps it will not be difficult for him to do so. What he may do initially is to retain the *form* of (3), about which he has no particular reason to protest, and replace the sentence operator '□' by one that imports into the analysis a weaker necessity than it. Indeed this is something that Kant actively encourages us to do, first by insisting negatively that the necessity with which he is concerned is not apodeictic and is neither theoretical nor practical (§ 18.1), and then positively, by contending that it is an exemplary necessity which is involved generating conclusions not so much about what everyone will find pleasing, but about what they ought to find so (Cf. § 19.1, § 7.2, § 8.2, § 40.7). For the moment I shall concentrate on the negative suggestion, leaving the positive one until later. To make the right kind of progress we shall be advised to turn our backs for a while on seeming technicalities and to reflect on the reasoning Kant relies on to justify the appearance of necessity in his analysis in the first place. With that behind us we shall know better what to look for.

4. Everything hinges here, as it did in establishing the universal component of the analysis, on the need to draw a proper distinction between the beautiful and the merely agreeable. In that earlier discussion the universality of delight in the beautiful is said to be "an essential factor of a judgment by which we describe anything as *beautiful*, [since] were it not for its being present to the mind, it would never enter anyone's head to use this expression, but everything that pleased without a concept would be ranked as agreeable" (§ 8.2).

What underlies this contention is Kant's belief that in respect of the agreeable everyone may have his own taste without logical conflict among those whose tastes diverge. By contrast, with the beautiful where there is disagreement between us it is a matter of logic that one or other of us is mistaken. The agreeable need not please everyone alike; the beautiful must.

Similarly, when at § 18 he comes to the discussion of necessity, Kant writes

Of what I call agreeable I assert that it actually causes pleasure in me. But what we have in mind in the case of the beautiful is a necessary reference on its part to delight.

And it is not too hard to appreciate why Kant thinks he can appeal to the same reflection to secure both of these elements in the analysis. It must surely be that universality by itself is too weak to generate the absolute contrast between the two concepts that he is looking for. While he believes that you and I may differ in our view of the agreeableness of something without either of us being wrong in the matter, it is nonetheless quite possible that we should both agree in our pleasure, and quite possible again that everyone who comes upon the object should find it pleasing. The last eventuality however could still not ensure that we had to do with something beautiful, for it might be a sort of fluke that we all took pleasure in the same thing. (cf. § 57 Remark II.3)

Someone might want to say here that on Kant's account the beautiful just is a subclass of the agreeable, namely the agreeable in which everyone finds pleasure, and that this is the thesis represented by my displayed sentence (2). But not only is this uninviting philosophical claim in its own right, it is also one that Kant would want vigorously to reject. First, it makes no room for allusion to necessity within the analysis of the concept and leaves no room for the dictum that the beautiful is "cognized as object of a necessary delight". To give up this is a remedy of last resort, and one that we should not yet grasp for. Second, and quite crucially, such an account would leave it utterly mysterious why judgments of taste, explained as I have explained them, should play the part they do in our discourse about beauty. If there were no more to that than happening to please universally, my own disinterested pleasure in an object could not reliably provide me with a systematically good reason for thinking that such universal pleasure obtains. In that case no experience of mine would enable me reliably to pick out beautiful objects from others that pleased me. That is the kind of knowledge I could acquire only "by groping about among other people's judgments". If that is what has primacy in legitimising our aesthetic claims then the role of taste in aesthetic appreciation and the critical guidance of people's aesthetic pleasures is rendered largely nugatory.

So too the idea that the artist directs his work by exercising critical judgment.

Rejecting this reductive treatment of the beautiful on Kant's behalf forces us to return to his notion of necessary delight. We are immediately helped to do so by his own speculative explanation of what it is that we have to rely on to generate the universality he thinks he has to secure. His thought is that the only thing that could bring about (non-accidental) universal agreement in our pleasures is a common sense, a human psychology, that is, which is governed by natural law. And while we are never told in any detail quite what the appropriate laws are presumed to be it seems reasonable to suppose that Kant takes it that they have the consequence that when we come across objects of the right sort and view them disinterestedly we shall as a matter of natural necessity all take pleasure in doing so. Can we now draw on this underlying programme to advance Kant beyond the point at which we left him at the end of the last section ?

5. Consider a sentence operator weaker than '□', 'N', (for natural necessity, a notion that is to cover both laws themselves and any necessities to which they give rise). Of course our problems would be at an end (after a fashion) if it were simply a natural law that just anything we disinterestedly perceive should please us. For then, without any worries about the necessary existence of ourselves or of such objects as do so delight us we might, consequently upon (2), assert just what Kant seems to require, viz (5) :

$$(5) (x)Bx \text{ iff } \boxed{N} (y) (DC \langle y, x \rangle, \text{Pleases } \langle x, y \rangle)^*$$

Certainly on that account the beautiful and the agreeable that universally pleases would then be distinct. (Naturally there would be a question about the very possibility of such fortuitous agreement, but Kant would here find it congenial to remind us of something I have preferred to leave under wraps : "Delight in the agreeable is coupled with interest" (§ 3.rubric)).

But obviously success cannot be had so easily. It is patently false that there is such a law, false that Kant thinks there is, and false too that everything we disinterestedly view is beautiful, which would directly follow from such a law when conjoined with the Kantian

*Read (5) : "For all x, x is beautiful if and only if everyone is nomologically such that if he disinterestedly contemplates x, x pleases him". I am assuming that the putative natural law could be written $\boxed{N} (x)(y) (DC \langle y, x \rangle, P \langle x, y \rangle)$.

idea of beauty so far developed. If the idea of natural necessity is to serve, it must do so in a different way.

From what Kant says in the Third Moment, where he is providing what I have called a *specification* of what human beings will find beautiful, it emerges that there exist objects having a structure of a kind such that when we come to regard them without any particular interest in their utility and without any cognitive purpose before us, they present themselves to us in a way we find pleasing. That we are pleased by objects with this structure would appear to be a lawlike matter, and indeed one which Kant would want to say must rest on a priori grounds (Cf. § 31.3). (En passant I remark here that this use of 'a priori' has nothing to do with the usage discussed in the first two sections above. It occurs only in the context of transcendental reflexion on what is required if the existence of beauty — so "patent to experience" (§ 38.2) — is to be possible at all. There has to be some law that generates necessary delight, and this we know a priori; but what the law is can only be known, if it can be known at all, a posteriori.)

If we apply this thought to the foregoing it will turn out to be a necessary truth about the beautiful — though not one that is properly speaking an analytic matter⁵ — that (6) :

$$(6) (x) Bx \text{ iff } (ES) \boxed{N} (y) (DC \langle y, x \rangle \ \& \ Sx, P \langle x, y \rangle)$$

In English, for all x , x is beautiful if and only if there is some structural property of x such that nomologically everyone is such that if he views x with disinterest while x is S , x pleases him. If this is right, and genuinely represents the kind of thing that Kant felt was transcendently required for the existence of beauty, whatever refinements he might insist on to get the suggestion into better shape, one problem is immediately apparent. It is neither maintained directly by (6), nor is it a consequence of it, that beautiful objects please their viewers as a matter of necessity. It takes us nowhere near the necessary pleasure of (4). The only necessity in the offing is that beautiful objects have a complex property of being nomologically such that having a certain structure, they will please universally. And this is not the same thing at all, as we see when we reflect that in the former case we should be demanding that beautiful objects are those that people are nomologically bound to like if they come upon them in the right spirit, while the latter makes the more modest claim, that the pleasure they feel is one that is nomologically

tied to a certain structural property. However, since we are not supposing at the moment that beautiful objects have to have the structural properties they do, we should not be inclined to accept that our pleasure in them is, as Kant wants, a necessary one, even when the necessity is taken to be just natural necessity.

In essence the problem is simple and acute. If Kant is not to rest content with (6), as the best he can have, the only way he can get to a necessity in any way akin to that of (4) is by some version of a modalised modus ponens argument. Now of course we accent arguments from $\Box(p,q)$ to $\Box q$, but only when we can rely on the premise $\Box p$ too. Analogously for the predicate modifier representation of necessity. Analogously again when the necessity is not apodeictic, but nomological. To infer from the lawlikeness of (p,q) to the lawlikeness of q itself I need the lawlikeness of p . In the present case that would amount to the possession of its actual structure by the beautiful object as a matter of natural (or apodeictic) necessity. That is missing. Or is it?

One way to move here might be faithful enough to one aspect of Kant's philosophy, though pretty desperate. Recalling his attachment to determinism in the phenomenal world, we might think that necessary pleasure in beautiful objects is just a consequence of that. For if the structure that things and people have is determined by their initial constitution and the laws that govern their development, it will appear less strange than at first it does to say that a given beautiful object had to have the structure that it actually has. Then indeed given the obtaining of a law like that which appears on the right hand side of (6), we could hope to infer that $\Box P < x,y >$. Then we should have a justification of a far-reaching kind for the necessity Kant appears to want to situate in the analysis itself.

However I doubt whether anyone would seriously want to pursue this path. But we must be sure we eschew it for the right reason. Someone might object that once we appeal to determinism again the problem which gave rise to our discussion of laws itself disappears. For that there should be universal pleasure in the agreeable, is now no longer possible. So we do not have to appeal to necessity, and the necessity of laws, to distinguish it from the genuinely beautiful. But that is a mistake. Let it be true that all events or all states of affairs are determined. That does not imply they are determined for all true descriptions we give of them. So while each individual pleasure in confronting an agreeable object may be explained by reference to some law, it does not follow that there

is some law by reference to which the universality of the pleasure may be explained. That may remain fortuitous, determinism notwithstanding. No, surely what should make us resist this move is just the thought that the existence of beauty is not itself dependent on determinism being true. In fact we know it is not true in general, but that knowledge does not undermine our belief in the existence of natural beauty "so patent to experience".

6. All our worries stem from seeking to detach the universal pleasure that appears in the consequent of my putative schematic law from its antecedent. It will now be apparent that this can not be done. However, it may occur to us to wonder whether it is really necessary to do so, for neither Kant, nor we, have any particular interest in assuring ourselves that beautiful objects must please us absolutely. All that we really care about is that, given the *actual* structure that they have, and abstracting from the admitted contingencies of their having it, they have to please. Once this is made plain it may occur to the latterday Kantian to wonder whether, all previous considerations notwithstanding, there is not a necessity to be had in virtue of the posited law, namely that beautiful things, relative to their possession of their actual structure, have to please universally. Should such thought be correct, Kant will have achieved what he wants, an analysis of the beautiful suitably close to (4) that does indeed speak of necessary universal pleasure. The only difference between it and previous representations we have toyed with will be that no longer is the beautiful cognized as object of a necessary delight simpliciter, but now only relative to its possession of that structure in virtue of which it pleases universally. Kant would surely say that no one should have taken him to mean anything else.

To be at all happy with this thought, however, we shall need to be persuaded of two things, first that this relativised necessity is something more than an instance of the law on which it claims to rest; and second, that the *necessitas consequentis* it presents itself as being is not just a *necessitas consequentiae* in disguise. Either flaw would be fatal to the proposal.

Were the former anxiety realised then our beautiful object, the goddess Venus, say, would merely be one that had a structure which nomologically ensures the delight of all disinterested observers. But the claim that given her actual structure, she has to please them all, says more than that. As instance of a law the necessity is still conditional, whereas here it is, relative to the satisfaction of the

condition, propounded as categorical. The first danger lapses.

Similarly, the man who says, pointing to Venus, given she is like this, she has to delight us all, appears to be saying something different from one who says that given the law, and given that Venus has a structure bringing her under it, it must be the case that she will universally please. This difference, he may say, can easily enough be brought out by considering a different case, unconnected with aesthetics, but structurally perfectly analogous. Let us suppose that, as it happens, everyone who reads these pages reads Japanese. So it must be the case that if you read these pages, you read Japanese. Still, we want to say, it might very well have been true that you should have read these pages without being able to read Japanese. By contrast, given that Venus has the structure she actually has, we could not have failed to take disinterested satisfaction in the sight of her. The necessity here attaches categorically, not conditionally, to the disinterested spectator.

If this is what we say on Kant's behalf, then it will be very hard to make out that he is not being deceived by appearances. It can scarcely fail to strike us that the contrast I have drawn depends on concealing a difference of supposition about the two general claims on which these arguments rely. In the one case we were supposing that it was a mere accident that all who read these pages should read Japanese, and that you might not have been able to do so without that affecting your present reading matter. In the other we were assuming, with Kant, that it is a matter of law that those with a structure suitably like Venus's should cause universal delight. Whether we say given the generalisation and the particular case it has to be the case that you do read Japanese, or that it is the case that we all have to find delight in Venus merely reflects a difference in our supposition about the standing (accidental or lawlike) of the generalisation. It does not determine that in the second case we are concerned with a *necessitas consequentis* any more than we are in the first one. This sobering outcome has consequences for Kant's doctrine that need to be explored.

The first is that even if the existence of beauty presupposes laws of the kind schematised in (6), no reference to necessary pleasure along the lines of (4) can properly turn up in the statement of the analysis of the beautiful. For that to be the case — for it to “be present to the mind”, as Kant puts it — we should need to be able to legitimise its appearance here, and if we are relying on the idea of a law to do that, the unavailability of a relativised *necessitas*

consequentis makes that impossible. Our pleasure in the beautiful is no more necessary in that case than is the pleasure of those who universally, but fortuitously, delight in the agreeable.

A second embarrassment is that whereas it would have been possible to reiterate an argument containing a relativised *necessitas consequentis* and apply it to a particular individual, saying for instance that not only is it the case that given Venus's structure everyone has to delight in the sight of her, but given also that *you* contemplate her with disinterest, *you must* take delight in her, now, in default of that first necessity, we have no route to the second. The most that can be the case is that given the law, and given Venus's falling under it, and given your disinterest, *you will* find delight there. That is not the same thing.

Despite these setbacks it could be said on Kant's behalf that the damage is not too severe. Two reflections make this clear. First, there is no immediate reason why the analysis should not be expanded so that the lawlike basis of the requisite delight is made plain. This can be done by letting (6) stand for the analysis itself. That would cohere perfectly with Kant's insistence, that the judgment of taste is non-cognitive, for (6) does nothing to state exactly what structure it is that nomologically implies universal delight. It may be even that a general specification of such a structure (or structures) other than in terms of the response it (or they) provokes can not be given. This is a limitation that Kant would find entirely acceptable. What is important is that once this emendment is made the distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful is no longer problematic, for universal pleasure in the agreeable is not nomologically based, whereas in the beautiful, it is. When this is recognised the whole motivation for appeal to the necessity of delight in the beautiful has disappeared. That such a pleasure can not be secured is then of marginal importance.

Second, it will be recalled that when we turn to the particular individual contemplating the particular object, Kant wants to be able to say something like "You must find delight here" if the object is beautiful, but not if it is merely agreeable. Now it was a consequence of our last reflections that the only available understanding of this sentence was of its elliptically expressing a mere *necessitas consequentiae*, — it must be that given the universal generalisation and given circumstances as they actually are, you will delight in the object. Only that this must be so is as much true when we are dealing with the universally agreeable as when we have to do with the

beautiful. So one wonders if it is not an unwelcome consequence of the Kantian position that it is insensitive to our actual ways of speaking.

Happily the answer is 'No', but for a reason that is easy to overlook. It is perfectly correct that as far as the elliptically expressed inference goes, the agreeable and the beautiful are on an equal footing. Only as things now stand, it is in the latter case alone that we could be in a position reasonably to assert it. To be able to do so we have to have grounds for thinking that the constitutive universal generalisation, that everyone who disinterestedly observes the object takes delight in it, is true, and according to Kant that will only be possible on the basis of our own subjective response to it, expressible in a judgment of taste. In the case of the agreeable, whatever my own subjective response to the object may be, I can have no reason to think that everyone else will respond to it as I do. Hence whether the thought is true or not, I am never in a position responsibly to claim that you must respond to it with pleasure. There does therefore remain this important difference between the two cases. Kant's analysis is not open to the charge that it is liable to distort our ways of speaking as long as speech is rationally directed.

7. However there is good cause not to rest content here. Not only are we ourselves unlikely to be fully satisfied with the resulting analysis; it does not even manage to do justice to that positive characterisation of necessary delight that Kant offers us and which at the end of section 3 I left hanging in the air in order to explore the idea of natural necessity.

The positive characterisation describes the necessity as *exemplary* (§18.1), and that commits us not to the idea that everyone *will* or *must* take pleasure in the beautiful, but that they *ought* to do so. Quite how to interpret this "ought" and quite where to situate it in Kant's theory are puzzling issues, but one matter germane to them emerges with clarity, and that is that Kant is ready to envisage some relaxation on the requirement of universality of the pleasure in the beautiful. Not everyone who ought to do something, always does it. This will inevitably have repercussions on the way in which he envisages that pleasure as necessary.

It is Kant's official doctrine that the only errors of taste that are possible result from our interest in an object not being properly disinterested. (Cf. §8.7). In fact however he occasionally mentions the further possibility of a man's taste being wayward, unpractised or immature (Cf §33.2, §22.7), and that will be manifest even when

his interest in the object of his attention is as detached from practical matters as may be wished. A beautiful object is one that I may make a mistaken judgment of taste about, hence it cannot be an analytic matter that everyone who comes to it in the right frame of mind will find pleasure in it. If that does sometimes happen that is at most a fortunate contingency.

To know what to do with this thought and whether to regard it as committing Kant to a deep inconsistency, we need to retrace our steps and look with greater care at the original argument on the basis of which the two elements of universality and necessity were first introduced. It was, I have said, to distinguish the beautiful from the agreeable that they made their appearance, and by way summary I reported Kant's thought saying "The agreeable need not please everyone alike; the beautiful must." (Section 4 above).

The attentive reader will have been swift to notice a fallacy in Kant's argument here, over which I have passed in silence. It follows in no way that if there can be fortuitous and even universal agreement in the agreeable, the pleasure that the beautiful evokes must be universal and necessary. All that can be concluded is that our agreement in the pleasure that the beautiful provides should be non-fortuitous. That does not imply that it is necessary. Nor does it have to be universal, for an object can be the source of non-accidentally widespread pleasure without it being by Kant's standards merely agreeable, and without that pleasure being universal among those who regard the object disinterestedly. So the proper argument about the agreeable is well able to accommodate unpractised discrimination and immaturity of taste. We have only to adjust the analysis accordingly.

Beautiful objects are now best thought of along Kantian lines as those which are the source of sufficient non-fortuitously widespread delight. Universality gives way to sufficiency; necessity, be it apodeictic or natural, gives way to the non-contingent, understood now as the non-accidental. This we can represent as (7) :

$$(7) \quad \Box(x) \text{ Beautiful } x \text{ iff Non-accidental (Sufficient } y) \\ (\text{DC } \langle y, x \rangle, \text{ Pleases } \langle x, y \rangle)^*$$

*Read (7) : It is necessary that for all x, x is beautiful if and only if it is no accident that sufficiently many of those who contemplate x with disinterest take pleasure in so doing.

Before passing on, three remarks should be recorded. First, all reference to the structure of the beautiful object in virtue of which it secures a wide measure of delight has been dropped. In our discussion of natural necessity it was needed in the — eventually vain — hope that with its help we should be able to record a necessity in the analysis. Now that that goal has been abandoned, reference there to structure is not called for. This does not however mean that structure does not play its part in accounting for our response. Of course it does, only it is open to Kant to say that its doing so is not something that is “present to the mind” as we use the expression “beautiful” in our judgments of taste or elsewhere.

Second, there can be no criterion for how many people are going to count as sufficiently many. That is always a matter for judgment, and there is no need to disallow all vagueness in the analysis. This will indeed be required if it reflects a vagueness in the analysandum, as I suspect it does.

Third, although we have now rejected the original argument by which Kant sought to introduce a necessity of some kind, it is as well to notice how difficult it becomes to persist with the idea of law-like necessity once the demands of universality have been relaxed. We are inclined to say that if a generalisation is lawlike it must be universal. So having weakened on the universality, we should be obliged to sacrifice natural necessity anyway.

Supposing now that (7) is the best proposal that we can offer in Kant's name while respecting the spirit of his thought, we can at last ask what sense we can make of his claim that pleasure in the beautiful enjoys an exemplary necessity. For plainly (7) says nothing to the effect that everyone (or even sufficiently many) *ought* to enjoy the individual beautiful thing. It merely insists that sufficiently many of those who come to it in the right spirit *will* do so. In the light of the distinction I drew earlier on between the content of a judgment and the grounds on which it may be (standardly or paradigmatically) made, it is attractive to think that Kant is once again conflating the two. For although there is no hint of an “ought” appearing in the analysis of the judgment of taste's content, if such a judgment is true, then one who says that the object of his attention is beautiful by way of a judgment of taste has all the information he needs to predict that others will share his own pleasure in the object. This expectation is one that may be expressed (both in German and in English) by saying that other people ought to take pleasure in it.

True though this may be, there are at least two reasons why

Kant would be dissatisfied if it were all that could be said. In the first place the expression of expectation does not extend universally. For the thought that the object is beautiful only commits us to there being sufficiently widespread pleasure, not absolutely general pleasure. Secondly Kant is quite explicit that the "ought" he has in mind expresses more than a mere expectation about how others will respond to the object, rather "the feeling [of pleasure] in the judgment of taste ... [is] ... exacted from everyone as a sort of duty" (§40.7). It would be nice to accommodate both of these points.

Interestingly, reflection on the relaxation of the universality requirement may show us how to do so. In Kant's mind because non-fortuitous agreement about our subjective responses to things had to result from the operation of natural law, he was naturally drawn to belief in the common sense that figures so boldly in the *Critique*. We who have abandoned universality in favour of something weaker, still need to explain how it is that widespread agreement in our pleasures comes about, and for Kant that question will be particularly pressing now that we have abandoned appeal to the kind of natural law that he believes to offer the only possible answer.

Now one option that Kant overlooks is that our sharing of our pleasures is a social matter. We learn from one another to take pleasure in the same things. We teach our children and our pupils to take pleasure in what we do. We cajole our friends; sometimes we hector strangers. Of course we do not pretend to universal success, but there are many things about which our success is sufficiently widespread to be noteworthy. We mark these out with title of their own. Development of this story will do much to explain how it is possible that beauty should exist, that is how it is possible that there should, in the absence of any law governing the matter, be instances of things towards which we non-fortuitously share a widespread community of response. It explains too how it is possible that there should be things in respect of which we justifiably expect (some) other people to respond to as we do. But more than this, the success, spread and extent of our persuasion and teaching will itself depend on the importance that it is generally believed the enjoyment of such particular pleasures in our society has. That is, at the end of the day, how widespread the community of pleasure in particular objects is will depend in part on how deeply enriching the pleasure they give is thought to be. *Ceteris paribus*, the richer the pleasure, the wider spread it will be. Here again there is nothing at which Kant need protest. Now only the last brick remains to be set in place. In the

case of the beautiful, in particular in the case of the outstandingly beautiful — and it is that around which our thoughts naturally revolve — we are likely to believe its enjoyment to be unassailably enriching. That after all is what explains our concern to pass on our enjoyment it to others. About it we feel just anyone has the best of reasons to learn to enjoy it, something we express by saying “everyone ought to take delight in it”. Here we are not expressing our expectations, we are, to put it with excusable Kantian hyperbole, “exacting it as a sort of duty”⁶.

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NOTES

¹ For detailed support see my “What is a Judgment of Taste?”, *Proc. VI Internat. Kant Congress* (forthcoming).

² Notice though that while the grounds on which it is advanced are a priori, what is synthetic is the content of the judgment.

³ Meredith translates this “definition”. “Elucidation” is closer to the German, but “analysis” might be even better for what Kant had in mind.

⁴ K. Ameriks, “Kant and the Objectivity of Taste”, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 23, 1983, 3–4.

⁵ Kant has, as far as I know, no clearly worked out doctrine distinguishing between those necessary truths concerning a concept that help to elucidate it and which fall within its analysis and those which elucidate but fall outside the analysis. Drawing on his remark at §8.2 about what is “present to the mind”, I simply impute to him the thought that the analysis comprises only such necessities as lie close to the conscious surface of our articulate grasp of a concept. Those that are deeper I speak of as belonging to the elucidation.

⁶ All the savour of the categorical imperative that comes with these words can be filtered out. It is not the word “duty” that matters, nor Kant’s understanding of that. What is crucial is what is said in claiming someone ought to take delight in something. The thought that they have every good reason to do so will ally this use of the word with its use outside aesthetics, and will only upset those unreconciled to the thought that feeling lies within the province of reason just as surely as thought.