

Introduction to Philosophy

Art and Aesthetic Judgment: The Special Nature of Aesthetic Judgment

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*.

Background

The theory of art Immanuel Kant sets out in his *Critique of Judgment* has been enormously influential. Even so, this theory is quite complex, for it attempts to solve a variety of puzzles. Foremost among these is Hume's dilemma: In what sense can judgments of artistic merit, which appear to be about our subjective feelings, be considered objective or factual? The question for Kant, as for Hume, is how a judgment about our feelings can have objective validity—for, when I say that the sunset is beautiful, I seem to be saying more than it appeals to me, claiming also in effect that the sunset's beauty is there for all to see. In this excerpt from the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant attempts to show why judgments of beauty are not like judgments of pleasure ("the agreeable") or morality ("the good"); this is in stark contrast to Hume, who claims that all judgments of beauty (and morality) reduce to judgments of pleasure.

Questions

1. What does Kant mean when he says that a judgment of taste is "devoid of all interest"? Why is such a judgment different from those concerning the agreeable or the good? Why does Kant believe that it makes sense to talk about "liking or disliking devoid of all interest"? Do you agree with him?
2. What is Kant's argument defending the claim that if a judgment of taste is devoid of all interest, then it must also be a universal judgment? Why does this make the beautiful different from the agreeable and the good?
3. In what sense are aesthetic judgments universal? Must everyone agree to them? Can there be legitimate disputes about taste with respect to beauty?
4. Why does Kant believe that judgments of taste presuppose a common sense? What is this common sense?
5. Does Kant's theory improve on Hume's? If so, explain how Kant modifies Hume's theory? If not, what problems do you see in Kant's theory not faced by Hume's?