

Discussion

Stephanie Koscak: I'm now going to open up the room for comments and questions. But should I, perhaps come down there? Do you think it will be awkward? [Koscak and Chaouli were sitting at opposite ends of the table, but Koscak ultimately decided not to switch seats].

Michel Chaouli: As you wish, as you wish. It's your call.

Koscak: Okay, so I'll turn it over to everybody.

Susan Staves: I'll try some elementary questions. Thank you, first, for a lucid exposition of a very difficult subject. Let me try some simple questions that are genuinely questions for me raised by your talk. First, could you say something about the extent to which the aesthetic experience you've just described—is there any similarity to the Pietist experience of salvation? (Which does seem to me to be somewhat similar especially in terms of the necessity of the subjective experience, reading to a normative demand that this be a universal experience; or, perhaps not, I know there was some Pietist influence on early Kant anyway, and it's in the culture in ways one might suppose had some overlap).

My second simple question is: could you please say something about the relationship between what Kant has to say here and what Hume has to say in "On the Standards of Taste"? And my third question is since I find myself as a more historically minded person [than you]—

Chaouli: One could hardly not be, I think. [Laughter].

Staves: —struggling with the, what seems to me, the lack of explanatory power of this theory to fit any description of changing taste. Let me give a simple example that also contains a question which is, I think...Take the question: when the original genius has created a new exemplary work in the way that you've described, what then happens to the older works? Have they become not beautiful? Is it a question of where, whether the beauty lies, it almost seems that it would almost follow from what you've explained that beauty doesn't lie in the work but has to, in some way (to go back to Meyer Abrams) lie in the audience. I mean, for instance, let's take changing musical tastes (since that's how I tend to think) over what degrees of dissonance are beautiful. Okay, start with—

Chaouli: I get the idea; so let me do this fairly quickly. The first one I don't have an answer for because my knowledge of Pietist tradition is kind of a Wikipedia knowledge or maybe a little more than that. So, I don't know enough about the ins and outs of the concept of salvation—I think there are a couple people in the room here, at least, who know more about it than I do, so I'll leave it to them if there is a bridge to be built or not. I would think "yes," given how deeply Kant is implanted in that tradition, but how precisely I'll leave aside.

The second one about Hume, I'll try to say a couple of things about it. So, what do they share? They share the intuition that yes, there is enormous variability across time and space and taste, but also that there is also a kind of weird way in which a kind of clustering (which then one has to think about how to characterize) occurs within taste. So, Hume tries to account for it, as I recall, through a study of bodies. So, how does the physiology of body respond to something like sweetness, on the one hand, but then to also historically account. There are ways in which certain

artworks—he keeps coming back to the Ancients, to Homer—established themselves over time as ways that guide our judgment. So, it’s... the standard is both in here [in bodies] in an empirical way and [it’s] out there. Kant completely brushes aside this idea because, as I tried to say, for him the idea that we would judge aesthetically based on an empirical study by asking around, by looking what others have said, completely evacuates this experience. So, it has to be lodged somewhere else, and that is the *a priori* operation that launches it.

And the third one is fairly easy to respond to: Kant is not giving an account of the particulars of taste, so that people will like this kind of music here and in Indonesia they like a different kind of music, etc. It’s not a catalogue of how we go about liking things. But, the idea is that there is underlying all of this, in so far as it is a genuine aesthetic experience and that we can talk about what bar that has to clear, there is a claim that is normative in all of them whatever the particular content may be. So, there is no ambition to account for any kind of change over time. Change over time happens in all kinds of things. But in order to make sense of it as an aesthetic experience some structure about it has to be recognized, and that this structure involves this normative dimension that I’m talking about. So, that’s OK, what you’re describing, that’s completely fine with him, right, you can change that, that’s alright.

Staves: But is it the case that the aesthetic experience resides in the perceiver, rather than in the work?

Chaouli: Yes. Well as you know it’s always more complicated, but that’s the immediate answer: yes. We attribute it to the work because the work, in a way, mediates the publicness of this experience. It’s not a phantasm, it’s not a dream-work, but it is a subjective condition that allows for this judgment. Yes.

Koscak: Thanks. Alright, we have Kate and then Richard.

Jonathan Elmer: [Inaudible, Elmer interrupts to get on the list because Koscak didn’t see his raised hand.]

Katherine Blake: That’s fine. I apologize in advance, I don’t know much about philosophy, and I don’t know exactly what the rules are about comparing across disciplines. But, as you were talking it just occurred to me that the way that you render Kant’s ideas here, it sounds an awful lot like J.L. Austin’s notion of a speech act. Where essentially what you are determining is not whether a statement is true or false, but whether a statement is felicitous or infelicitous depending on whether you are able essentially to convince the other people around you that your speech act has some potency to it, right? or some cachet.

So, one of the things that I was thinking, Susan, as you said, you know, “how does this reflect historically changing tastes?” it seems that, [referring to a handout with passages from Kant’s *Critique*] especially number four here, what Kant is saying is that he no longer, authority is no longer a condition to make this kind of act felicitous, right?¹ So, I would say that for, you know,

¹ If someone reads me his poem or takes me to a play that in the end fails to please my taste, then he can adduce Batteux or Lessing, or even older and more famous critics of taste, and adduce all the rules they established as proofs that his poem is beautiful; ... I will stop my ears, listen to no reasons or arguments, and would rather believe that those rules of the critics are false or at least that this is not a case for their application than allow that my judgment should be determined by means of a priori grounds of proof (*CJ*, §33, 284-5).

Austin authority is very important, right? Because you have to have the authority to say something in order for that thing to catch on, right? So I can't just declare someone married to someone else, right? There has to be... so if what Kant is suggesting is that now authority is not really a part of what determines, you know, aesthetics, right, if I can rely on my own authority, then necessarily that sort of falls out. Then maybe that's part of the sort of historical change that's happening here is around the question of who has the authority to say what about aesthetics. I don't know if that helps or what you think?

Chaouli: Interesting. Thank you very much for the comments. Yes, the last quote about Lessing and Batteux—and an even more famous quote is even more explicit—but I do not accept (not I Kant, but I the person having the experience), do not accept authority.

I don't know about the historical change because it's not like our aesthetic regime has abandoned the idea of authority. In fact, in the one phrase that I suggested with Schiller and what comes after it has, it's replaced by what Matthew Arnold calls touchstones, so these exemplary texts that we must go back to in our education to form ourselves into good citizens. And so, that's all about authority; it requires, obviously, those exemplars of authority and it requires authority, as we know from debates in this country, what counts as an exemplar. So, this particular construction I don't think has historical legs. It hasn't built institutions because it is fundamentally not institutional, right? And so, one of Schiller's great achievements, I think, well, not evaluatively, just lasting is to make, is to produce an institution, an institution of education around this idea.

I don't believe (and I disagree here with an important essay by David Lloyd which is about Kant's examples becoming pedagogical tools), I don't think, in fact, they yield as that, they are far too strange and singular to allow for something like this.² That's why I said I don't think something new in the sense of a new historical moment is instituted here, you don't have schooling.

Blake: Because context matters, right? The context under which the statement is, sort of, produced, the concept of beauty, is that the idea?

Chaouli: No. Because, in a way, it doesn't matter. There is no...or, it matters or it doesn't matter depending on the situation: there are no conditions ahead of time you could name about a context that would make it (in your terms or in Austin's term) more felicitous or not, right? Which is why it has something completely unpredictable and contingent about it. So, that's why there's a mournfulness about Wordsworth going back to the place where you had a successful aesthetic experience and then searching for it. In that sense this is a way of giving a theoretical underpinning to something like that.

Koscak: Richard.

Richard Nash: First, I want to thank you, both insincerely and sincerely [laughter], but deeply, for what was a really wonderful and interesting paper. And, part of my interest was in watching people around the room, as you must have noticed, very busily taking detailed notes and frequently nodding. I think all of us felt (as I did) the sense of Kant being, in some ways, reani-

² David Lloyd, "Kant's Examples," *Representations* 28 (Autumn 1989), 34-54.

mated here. And, I found myself thinking about what Michel's students must think, and I imagine that they think very positive things. And that led me to thinking about how wonderful it would be to create a little tag on ratemyprofessor.com for Immanuel Kant and then damn him with all his own lines [laughter]. Doesn't care about student opinion. You know, boring. No chili peppers [laughter].

But, I'm going to ask you to be, in some ways, self-reflective in a way... it seems to me that I found myself listening for Kant moving to talk about aesthetic example in terms of the possibility for self-reflection, and I'm thinking of two moments in particular in your third quote on the handout, but then also the moment that you began with. So in the third quote: "In this way the product of a genius"—let's call him Kant—"is an example, not for imitation, but for emulation of another genius" (let's call him Michel) "who is thereby awakened to the feeling of his own originality to exercise freedom from coercion in his art in such a way that the latter thereby itself acquires a new rule by which the talent shows itself exemplary." And, I'm interested because it was very much that sense in which that was part of the pleasure, the real pleasure of that performance for me was having you make sense of Kant for me in ways that made me feel I had a better understanding of Kant precisely because I had a better understanding through your performance. And that triggered my awareness that you began by giving us a handout saying, "Kant is so boring, he's even more boring than I." And, that's where the insincerity of my profusion comes in because you began with a moment that it seems to me is, precisely in terms of how you live up to this role of following the example of Kant, of performing seriously this kind of work that you also presented with a sort of self-deprecation. Maybe this is a question of historical change, and the difference between the moment in which Kant is working out these ideas and the moment where we, as teachers who are on ratemyprofessor.com, work out and work through a different method.

So, I'm just thinking about that tie here is about where his comment in the third is about specifically this idea that genius shows itself as a model for emulation as a form of self-expression, it seems to me that for us that moment of self-expression is never pure, it's also mixed with this capacity for self-reflection simultaneously, right? I'm not sure how to frame that into an intelligent question or even an intelligible question, perhaps; but, partly this is just a way to wrap my appreciation both sincere and insincere for what you just did.

Chaouli: Yeah, well thank you, that's very nice. The challenge, I think, is... the challenge in exemplarity, I think, is to allow oneself to be surpassed or to build oneself up in such a way as to be surpassed. So, I was talking to a colleague the other day about MOOCs and online teaching and whatever, and he said "So, what do you think actually happens in the classroom?" And I said, "Look, I think one of the things that happens is that we are exemplars, we the teachers are exemplars, but we are exemplars not in the sense of mastery, but in the sense that the mastery has to be surpassed, so that we have to be understood as something that the students can knock over at some point." And so, this is precisely not about the transmission of knowledge or control or hierarchy, but it's the opposite and it doesn't seem to me that there are many other situations in which this can happen easily.

So, maybe that's part of the logic of exemplarity in the way that I'm understanding it here. I don't really feel like I'm in any way knocking over Kant, that would be too heuristic?? beyond belief and completely unnecessary since there's such great stuff. But it does require, yeah I think, awakening, it does require some kind of a jolt (redescription is actually the way I am thinking of

it, much more modestly) to see what's going on there in this bizarre, convoluted, weird language. So, if it did that: great, fantastic! I'm happy.

Koscak: Anahid?

Anahid Nersessian: Okay. So I think this might dovetail nicely, actually. I want to actually put some pressure on the example you gave to illustrate what it means to conform with someone else's aesthetic judgment, and it's the ... if I tell you I'll expect you at 7:30, then it entails a certain kind of obligation to come at 7:30. So, you know, it seems to me true, and not that interesting to say that if I come at 7:35 I have conformed to your expectation, more or less, right? Well, maybe not if you're really Kant [laughter]. But, so let's just say for you [Chaouli] if I come at 7:35, it's fine. Right?

Chaouli: If it's you, it's fine. [laughter].

Nersessian: Right. Okay, so but then there are other examples where the boundaries of that conformity seem much more elastic, so I'll give you another example. If I live in Evanston, but I say I live in Chicago that seems more or less okay, right? Now, this may seem an idiosyncratic example, but if I say I live in Manhattan when, in fact, I live in Brooklyn that doesn't seem to be quite the same rule bending. Even though Evanston and Chicago have as much geographical proximity as Brooklyn and Manhattan, right? So, I guess this is an invitation for you to extend your own claims about the form of the rule that governs that kind of convention because it would seem very un-Kantian to say well, these are merely conventions. 7:35 is conventionally, basically 7:30, Evanston is conventionally, basically Chicago, but Manhattan and Brooklyn are conventionally dissimilar, right? So, I don't want to say it was just convention because then we are totally not in the realm of Kant anymore, so I want to ask you or to invite you to speculate on the form of the rule that governs that kind of conventionality.

Chaouli: Thank you. One should never give examples—this I think is the lesson. [laughter]. So, so one... I mean, you have been hanging around analytic philosophers, I think, for way to long. [laughter].

Nersessian: Me?

Chaouli: You. [laughter]. She's married to one, in case you—

Nersessian: We don't hang out that often. [laughter].

Chaouli: It's still too long. [laughter]. So... so the 7:30 thing was meant to elucidate the notion of how something like expectation could be normative, there is nothing more that I want to say about that than that. So, there's nothing about the precision about it, there is nothing about whether this is moral or cognitive or some other thing that's promised or not. So there are all kinds of... I know that in certain kind of analytical philosophy you can run with this for a long time. But so, for my purposes there is no further pressure on this than to say "When he says I expect, it is not an empirical claim." Like, ah, I see you haven't done it, how surprising, right? But, it is purely a "should," that is all I meant by the expectation. And since there is no fulfillment

part to this, there is also no question of is this half fulfilled or is it completely fulfilled, right? It is really only a claim part, right, which makes it so strange.

Now, there is a part later in *The Critique* where Kant distinguishes about... he says “Look, the taste of sparkling wine from the Canaries, you actually cannot dispute, there is no discussion about it” but there is a way of discussing this, mainly the conditions under which you have made your judgment. So, it’s not about have you done it half or not, but what leads you to say this is the kind of thing I could be asking. What leads you to say that this X is for you beautiful, which is to say it has a claim on you, right? *That* we can talk about and I think we do talk about it, actually, all the time. So, that’s what I would say about this.

Koscak: Johannes?

Johannes Türk: My question is a little conservative, but I perceive what Richard perceives, in that you do something with Kant that is there, it’s clearly there, but it’s not actually what happens in Kant. In other words, I think you, so to speak, assemble fragments from Kant, and then move him into a dimension where he actually is not.

Chaouli: OK.

Türk: And, the first thing is the movement from judgment to experience that I think is extremely crucial. So, interestingly, most claims, for example, about the generality occur in passages where Kant actually talks about judgment. So, he talks about what do we mean if we say this is beautiful and what does this judgment imply (the verbal thing), not is there something in my feeling or experience... The two may be connected, but in Kant, you know, it’s actually a problem that he talks about aesthetic judgment, and, as Derrida says, he approaches the whole question with the instruments of a philosophy with categories and a philosophy with the faculties that’s developed in the realm of the cognitive and the moral. And then he comes here to this dimension of the aesthetic, and he still uses that language and even finds the four moments of the beautiful, of the judgment and the beautiful, according to categories developed in *The Critique of Pure Judgment*.

So, in a way the question is how far do you, so to speak, see Kant, discover in Kant a dimension in which you then abandon, so to speak, in a strict sense the Kantian text, and how far not? And, I think that’s one question I have, and I find it wonderful because in a different way, I would say, this points to a similar question that you had, namely that this is a text that, strictly speaking, cannot be interpreted philosophically or... but rather, the text itself becomes something like an example where you need to engender rules or texts in order to really recuperate something of that dimension that becomes meaningful and coherent, right?

But, I find it difficult to interpret the Kantian text historically and strictly because then it falls apart the more coherent the interpretive discourse becomes. So, in that sense it is an extremely interesting text to me, that is hardly legible, actually, on it’s own terms if you really strictly follow them. So, that’s only the first area. But the second, what is for me a real question also, is how you then embed what is Kant’s—Kant’s aim is really to embed the aesthetic in the totality of his philosophy and in a way the longer part of *The Critique* is devoted to, you know, the teleology of nature, so, and our relationship to organized beings, that’s actually so, the aesthetic is actually (most people may know it, but some not), but it’s actually the smaller part of it whose larger part is devoted to organic form, to teleology in nature and the two are connected in an important way. And, I think this becomes important because that seems to be the pedagogical mis-

sion, in a way, that one could deduce from Kant for the first part that's more devoted to the humanities, if you want, it's to assign them a role in training judgment, a necessary role in training our judgment for the, for our knowledge or our cognitive relation to living, the living form of beings in the world.

So, I mean, these are two areas that I'm interested, and I hope it is sharp enough for you to be able to relate to it. And, I mean, a lot of things would follow in the first domain. I could say Kant does talk about artworks, other than in very few paragraphs, he talks about the aesthetic in nature, actually, he does certainly not mention texts as a possible option of the aesthetic judgment. So, there are a lot of interesting things that follow from this question of historically reading Kant, certain faithfulness to the text, and the text itself forcing to be read ahistorically, in a certain way, which you actually do in a marvelous way, you know.

Chaouli: So, let me just take these in reverse order. I completely disagree that the first part of *The Critique* (which is about aesthetics) is a propaedeutic for the second part. They are connected in some ways, basically, in the concept of purposiveness and reflective judgment, that's true. But, really the connection is extremely loose, and the most interesting parts of the first part have really nothing to do, as far as I can see, with the part about how do you go about making sense of organic nature which is a really interesting section if you haven't read it. Most people, well, most people don't read the third critique, which is their loss but, if they could wade into it it's not just the stuff about aesthetics, but actually the stuff about organisms is amazing and helps to clarify some confusions that, say, people who were into intelligent design have. I mean, so, Kant kind of figured that out, and, you know, we're still quarrelling.

So, that's that part; I just disagree with your reading about it. He also has tons to say about texts; by the way, he quotes Frederick the Great's poem and so on. So, in fact, poems for him are the greatest artworks. But, the really hard question for me is the one about faithfulness, right? It's a hard question for any reader of anything. And so, what do I want to say about it? No, of course I don't want to be wrong about it, and I think I would like to remain true to the logic of what's going on, right? Insofar as one can recuperate it, you're absolutely right that the text is also bizarrely fragmented and some things are incomprehensible. At the same, I want to activate the parts that seem to me to be saying things to me that I can think with. And so, for example, the distinction between judgment and experience: it's nothing. He's interested in judgment because that's the logical form that shapes the structure of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, so he runs with it over here. If you actually look what judgment means, it is completely intertwined with experience. There is really no part of aesthetic experience that is in some way de-coupleable from this. Over here you have the experience, and then you come out and utter something, that's not how it works. The whole thing is a multidimensional unit, right?

So, for me, I don't really worry about it. I know that other Kantians will be all over this, and say "No, no, but... You know, the four modalities blah, blah, blah." That's fine, but that's not interesting to me. At the same time, I don't want to get it wrong. So, it's a delicate thing. I see now what you mean by coming back to Richard's point. Yes, one has to be unfaithful, to some extent, without being entirely wrong. And that will be the rub, the test to see whether this is right, whether people will take this as that or not.

Koscak: So, we just have a few minutes left, and we have three questions. So, I don't know if we are at the point where we should ask the questions collectively. So, we have Frauke, Oz, and Jonathan all have questions, in that order.

Frauke Berndt: OK, I'll just try to make it short because Johannes already said what I wanted to say, basically... That was a very unKantian reading of Kant, but I think it's not a problem. First, because I think faithfulness is not something which we have to fulfill—I don't know, it does not occur to me as something appropriate for a reader. But, in the... I mean, what you did you basically killed Kant's little helpers without saying, right?

Chaouli: Kant's what?

Berndt: Kant's little helpers.

Chaouli: Ah, okay...

Berndt: So like the *sensus communis* and so on, right? And by doing that you have been pushing him to the limits of the system, and I think that is very interesting and very productive. And, that makes Kant quite a new Kant in a way because three concepts occur which basically Kant would not be so particularly happy about, that is the concept of events, the concept of empirical instance, and the concept of contingency. And, all three of them seem to me to be an offer to the workshop since we have been investigating the problem under which condition an individual object can become an example. So for me, it occurs that you replace the concept of examples with the concept of instance and would you like to comment on that? If "instance" would be an offer, a conceptual offer to the workshop in order to get that problem kind of clear.

Chaouli: I think that's marvelous, thank you. And I think certainly in the aesthetic sphere that is precisely what I would say is operative.

Berndt: Right, but we are at the sphere and all that examples too, I mean, we are talking about, remember, the King's head and so on. That would explain many things of the example, we so far have been touching, yet not accomplished to conceptualize.

Chaouli: Yeah, so, that I see less. Maybe you can explain to me more because I thought the whole struggle in Ron's... well, Ron is describing is about how to control that example.

Berndt: True.

Chaouli: Right? That it doesn't, it doesn't... it can go in a lot of different directions, and as you [Schechter] pointed out, you can look at some of these depictions [of the execution of Louis XVI] and you wouldn't know if it was a supporter or a detractor.

Berndt: True.

Chaouli: So, there is a political struggle about how to read the, how to make an instance into an example, maybe we could put it this way?

Berndt: Maybe.

Chaouli: Yeah, that's very interesting, thank you. I hadn't thought about it in this clarity, but I think you're right that I had said in the beginning an instance but not an example, but I didn't really work it out.

Berndt: True, true. Yeah, I caught onto that moment.

Chaouli: Yeah, yeah, and you're absolutely right that I do want to say that "for instance" is different than "for example" in this case, yes, yeah. Thank you.

Oscar Kenshur: Well, my comment was going to be sort of subjective, but I think I will also make it private as well as subjective. [laughter].

Jonathan Elmer: Well, is there time?

Koscak: Well, one final question.

Elmer: Well, this was actually just for the room anyway, so I can just lay it out there, and people can think about it. So, the little exchange at the end there of Johannes jumping off of Richard being faithful historically, historically faithful to Kant or not and the very possibility of it makes me ask the question, it seems to me, what Kant is very good at and has been very influential at, has been putting in place a kind of structure (and this is not just only in the third critique, but elsewhere, too) where something is, where he says something like we cannot help but behave in this way and we cannot defend our—so, he puts into place structures, sort of, exigency and indefensibility. There is a claim being made, the grounds of which cannot be provided. And, this is explicitly what he's trying to do with subjectivity universality and aesthetic experience: my pleasure, in a sense, makes a claim on other's pleasure, I can't provide any account.

Now, it seems to me there's enormous pushback against most, as you pointed out, normativity in particular in our current climate is almost universally anathematized, in the humanities especially, but possibly in larger politically spheres that are not humanistic.

Berndt: Assessment, we call it assessment [laughter].

Elmer: Assessment, right. But, it does seem to me that the exchange that we just had bears out something that seems important to at least think about. So, if there is something like aesthetic interpretation still being practiced by people who work with aesthetic materials, and by that I mean aesthetic interpretation that cannot and cannot be reduced to a matter of historical explanation, not be reduced to a historicist account of it. And, also cannot be justified as on the grounds of a normative argument, say a political argument or a moral argument where really the where the interpretation is being overtly instrumentalized and absorbs itself in this larger project of a political or normative argument. If things happen that are neither historicist or moral, but interpretation takes place of the kind, perhaps, that Michel has just performed on the third critique, which cannot be justified as faithful, is an example, therefore, as you pointed out, of the kind of aesthetic argument. I think this is happening quite a lot. I think it happens all the time, and I think, it seems to me, that the disbelief that the profession (just to take literary critics for a moment), the disbelief they're doing anything like this is massive bad faith. And I just thought—

Chaouli: Can you say again what like this?

Elmer: They are doing, OK, they are producing a set of interpretations that abide by the structure that Kant puts in place.

Chaouli: OK.

Elmer: There is no justification for it, it's not, it cannot be reduced to the work of producing empirical history, it is not is justified by a moral, it is simply a subjective universality at work, and you can only do it if you imagine, at some level, it makes a claim on. It makes a claim on others. I mean, what else does it—? And to this extent, sure it was very smart, he put in place the mechanism of aesthetic education, whereby this massive bad faith could operate for two centuries [laughter], and that's a comment I leave it for the room.

Mary Favret: I guess one thing: the last words of Michel's paper had to do with the lack of security, and he used the words, I assume, quite pointedly. Twice you say, the, no security. This is not a safe place to be, I mean, and it's not intended to be a safe place. And, I think it's very hard not to play it safe in our world, in an institutionalized setting, but that lack of security, I think, is making a claim for me.

Chaouli: Thank you.

Koscak: Thank you. [Applause].