

The Exemplary and the Normative in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

MICHEL CHAOULI

My paper tries to describe and analyze the normative dimension of aesthetic experience, as Kant articulates it in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), and put it in relation to the concept of exemplarity. The *force* of the exemplary is basically the normative force of aesthetic experience.

Kant's intuition was that beauty is a different mode of standing in relation to the world than the modes he had already analyzed, namely the cognitive and the moral. Unlike moral claims or ordinary cognitive judgments, judgments about beauty cannot appeal to an authority outside of themselves, be it a rule book or an expert. Yet there is another side to this, for Kant insists that this act of judgment, while through and through subjective, is not therefore private but rather universal.

In trying to understand this universal dimension, I show how Kant rebuffs the empiricist project of discovering the standard of taste in a project that seeks to establish regularities among facts (history, physiology, etc.). He also rebuffs the usual alternative to finding regularities in the immanent world, which is to look for them in transcendence. If the aesthetic is a genuinely distinct way of relating to the world, then it cannot be governed by concepts, for in that case it would be reducible to a form of reason and therefore not constitute a distinct domain.

Aesthetic experience is a form of experience that constitutively eludes the reach of concepts, yet one that at the same time lays claim to universality and the normativity that attends it. In this situation, the notion of exemplarity enters the text. The "special" necessity we encounter in aesthetic experience, the "necessity of the assent of *all* to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that one cannot produce," Kant maintains, "can only be called *exemplary*" (§18, 237). I show that in the aesthetic domain, the logic linking the exemplar to a general rule that it exemplifies breaks down in all of its social and cognitive dimensions. This breakdown is occasioned not because Kant abandons the logic of exemplarity but because he adheres to it as he had never done before, namely by formalizing it through and through.

I discuss how Kant invokes the logic of exemplarity in two contexts. These are the context of aesthetic experience, where he identifies as exemplary the normative force that is carried by all aesthetic judgments, and the context of aesthetic production, the principal agent of which is genius. In both, the exemplary exemplifies a rule that does not exist independently and cannot be put in conceptual terms. Example and rule are singular instances of one another. I draw out the implications of this model for the notion of exemplarity in five areas.

1. Aesthetic exemplarity reverses the temporal order we know from other forms of exemplarity.

2. There is also a logical or epistemological reversal at work. The rule, while partaking of universality and necessity, depends for its existence on an entirely contingent, empirical event, namely the flashing up of beauty in some material instance.

3. We can also note a conceptual reversal, which is not a symmetrical turn of the usual order but an overturning or upending. There is no rule to speak of here. We observe instead a rule-boundness without rules, just as there is a normativity without norms.

4. Universality, as it operates in the aesthetic sphere, is focused into a claim and though this claim has no mechanism of enforcement on its side, *that* it can be made under certain conditions is not delusional. Subjective universality names the idea that we are the kinds of beings who can have an experience grounded in the feeling of pleasure that can be the occasion for making a claim on the responsiveness of all other such beings.

5. Aesthetic experience is a singular experience. This singularity removes aesthetic experience from all systems that would manage it. It makes the experience unsuitable for the pedagogical purposes in whose service moral and political exemplarity has been put and to which aesthetic exemplarity is put by Friedrich Schiller and the tradition of aesthetic education that follows him. Though aesthetic experience must occur within a social and historical situation crisscrossed by vectors of power and mediated by institutions, it is in its core not determined by them. What is more, because the aesthetic exemplar is a singular occurrence, it cannot be folded into the sort of iterative system, whether symbolic or allegorical or otherwise, that would give rise to a field of controllable meanings. In fact, it is not clear whether it predictably yields any meaning at all. This may be the point at which aesthetic exemplarity deviates furthest from its moral version. The efficacy of moral exemplarity seems to me to lie in its power to instantiate a norm whose value is secured ahead of time. It is just this security that is lacking in Kant's conception of aesthetic exemplarity.