

The Rejection of the Concept of Good Taste in Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment

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ENG Abstract: In this article, I argue that Kant breaks with the tradition of aesthetics and with a concept inherently tied to it, namely, that of good taste or correct taste. This thinker not only acknowledges, similarly to the Anglo-Saxon traditions of *criticism* and *common sense*, that it is impossible to demonstrate who possesses taste, but also maintains that there is nothing to be demonstrated in this regard. For taste does not admit of degrees, as if it were a psychological faculty or a matter of fact, such as social recognition at a given historical moment and under specific empirical circumstances. The principles of taste should not be understood as prescriptive rules; rather, they are second-order principles that do not concern how we ought to judge in each case but rather what properly constitutes the specific possibility of taste as such. What follows from the correct interpretation of these principles is a thesis that challenges the aesthetic tradition and the concept of good taste, for through its principles and the way it defines their origin, scope, and validity, it asserts that taste should not be understood as a judgment about objects or about subjects understood as an actual community.

Keywords: Kant, taste, good taste, aesthetics, *Critique of Judgment*.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Historical background. 3. The critique of taste is not an aesthetics. 4. The Deduction of Judgments of Taste and the concept of *sensus communis*. 5. Autonomy and Disagreement in Taste. 6. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction¹

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant takes into account various philosophical traditions that he knows well and from which he has critically drawn throughout his intellectual development. However, in his view, none of them allows for the recognition of the specific nature of the faculty of judgment that we call *taste*. Despite their notable differences, both the empiricist philosophy of *common sense* and rationalist classicism presuppose the legitimacy of the concept of *good taste*. It might seem that Kant also accepts it: his demand to demarcate the judgment of taste concerning beauty from the judgment of the agreeable, his conviction that taste can be cultivated, and his theory of fine art all appear to suggest that there is a good taste as opposed to a merely apparent or unrefined taste. However, one of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment's* original contributions is precisely its overcoming and rejection of the concept of good taste, even though this may not be immediately evident, given that the work describes the claims to universal assent that are made in every individual judgment of taste.

When we speak of good taste, we specify this faculty from a normative perspective, in such a way that we maintain that, among different individuals who judge according to the faculty of taste –that is, who make a judgment of taste regarding what is beautiful–there is a difference in degree between them. Consequently, we believe that some people indeed have greater or better taste than others. We can also understand the specific difference designated by the concept of good taste in absolute qualitative terms, insofar as we recognise that some people possess taste –namely, people of good taste– whereas others do not, even if they may claim to have it. That matters of taste are often a site of dispute seems to reinforce the idea that

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those who judge in accordance with taste can hardly dispense with the concept of good taste. In this regard, we argue with others over matters of taste because we consider that they are mistaken in their aesthetic evaluation of an object or experience. On other occasions, we privately acknowledge that those who listen to certain types of music or enjoy certain films do so because they lack taste –or at least a taste as refined as the one we attribute to ourselves.

The belief in the existence of good taste is, in fact, independent of whether we can effectively determine it through rules or precepts that allow us to discern who possesses taste and who does not, or which objects or experiences are capable of eliciting a genuine judgment of taste. In other words, one may hold that it is impossible to resolve a dispute concerning matters of taste, yet this position remains compatible with the idea that, if two individuals are disputing about taste, at least one of them lacks this capacity for aesthetic appreciation. I may believe that not everyone has the same taste and that some people *have* good taste while others *possess* it to a *lesser* degree or lack it entirely, even while acknowledging that there are no rules, precepts, or criteria that enable me to determine where good taste resides and to settle any dispute definitively. For many interpreters, this could be Kant's position. This interpretation appears to be supported by the philosopher's defense of the existence of a *sensus communis*, which serves as an ideal norm and a regulative principle for judgment, alongside his recognition that it is not possible to determine, by means of rules, the conformity of a particular judgment to this norm.

However, I will argue that Kant's position is considerably more complex: while, *from the standpoint of one who judges* according to taste, it is inevitable to presuppose, in one way or another, the existence of good taste, the *transcendental and philosophical critique* of taste –which critically reflects, as a second-order discourse (Tinguely 2013), on this faculty of human reason– detects the transcendental illusion inherent in this belief, which is characteristic of human experience. At the same time, it questions whether the concept of good taste, as just described, is adequate for a philosophical account of the specific nature of this faculty. Defending this thesis fundamentally requires distinguishing between two dimensions, which are intertwined—at times without any clear discontinuity—in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. First, Kant describes how the *one who judges* according to taste *represents* their own experience; this is a description of the *critique of taste*, that is, the critique exercised by taste itself, which is essentially a *critical* faculty of judgment. Second, we encounter the *transcendental critique of taste*, the philosophical critique that focuses on taste, that is, the second-order discourse aimed at clarifying the conditions of possibility of this faculty or dimension of human reason².

From this perspective, I will argue that the concepts presupposed in the natural way in which one who judges through taste represents their own activity do not necessarily have to be dogmatically retained by the transcendental critique of taste. In relation to the issue at hand, this can be expressed as follows: to judge according to taste is effectively to lay claim to good taste, yet the transcendental critique reveals that this concept does not, strictly speaking, possess objective meaning, even though it is an integral part of how we judge and must therefore be explained within a philosophical understanding of the faculty of taste.

2. Historical background

Both empiricist criticism and rationalist classicism presuppose the objective validity of the concept of good taste. In the positions of Hutcheson, Hume, Home, and Burke, we find the general idea that the experience of taste arises from a sensory, physiological, or psychological response of the human being, such that agreement or concurrence in matters of taste among different agents is explained by the empirical universality of human nature (Guyer 1997: 4ff.). For Hutcheson, taste is not a private subjective response but rather reflects universal principles based on harmony and proportion (1725: sect. I, § 8). Due to the similarities between aesthetic and sensory responses, he speaks of a “sense of beauty,” in such a way that wherever there is a beautiful and well-proportioned object, it will *necessarily* be pleasing to whoever contemplates it (1728: 11). David Hume, in *Of the Standard of Taste* (1757), argues that, although there may be disagreement among individuals in matters of taste, an experienced critic can establish reliable standards of aesthetic appreciation. This is because beauty is properly a form that *produces* pleasure, just as deformity produces pain (1739–1740: 167ff.). A physiologically grounded explanation is found in Edmund Burke, for whom an object is pleasing to the subject insofar as it acts upon them by relaxing their senses (1757: 149ff.). However, even though the aesthetic response is based on a relationship between the object and the subject's perceptual or physiological system, this does not prevent these authors from defending an empirical universality of taste, derived precisely from the belief in the universality of human nature (Guyer 1997: 4). It is precisely this human nature that accounts for the *common sense* that taste appears to presuppose. There may be disagreement in matters of taste due to individual particularities, but if the cultivation and education of this faculty are assumed, every human being can ultimately learn to judge *correctly* and possess good taste.

On the other hand, in the historical development from Leibniz's *Meditations* to pre-critical Kant, we observe a progressive recognition of the specificity of a sensory type of cognition (on this issue, see Sánchez-Rodríguez, 2014). For Wolff and Baumgarten, when we appreciate beauty, we are in fact cognising the perfection of objects in a different manner—namely, in an indistinct, confused, or sensory way. For Wolff,

² While this division has generally –and rightly– been understood as that between the Analytic, devoted to the *quid facti*, and the Deduction, concerned with the *quid juris* (Allison 2001: 67ff.), in this case, what interests us is rather the distinction between two concepts of the critique of taste present in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Furthermore, the transcendental critique of taste articulates a transcendental dialectic aimed at dispelling the contradictions and illusions that naturally arise in our way of understanding and justifying the validity claims of taste.

the feeling of pleasure is a type of sensory cognition of the perfection that ultimately underlies objects (1713: §§ 404, 417). Thus, despite the differences between Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, and Meier, and despite the clear influence these authors exerted on Kant in this domain, it can be said that they regard the judgment of taste as a type of cognitive judgment in which, although not through distinct analysis, we confusedly detect or recognise the perfection of objects through the feeling of pleasure. For Baumgarten, then, taste is a faculty of judging in a sensory manner, which allows for both empirical cultivation –based on practice and experience– and theoretical formalization –based on distinct cognition (1739, § 607). Regardless of whether we apprehend perfection in a sensory or intellectual manner, in both cases, we cognise the same thing. In this respect, we must acknowledge that a judgment of taste can be *false*, as Baumgarten himself asserts: “The lapses of sense judgment are deceptions of the same” (1739, § 608)³.

Thus, despite their fundamental differences, both in the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of *common sense* and in the rationalist aesthetics of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school, it is ultimately presupposed that the judgment of taste expresses a certain type of sensory cognition –either as an expression of a universal human nature or as a way of confusedly and sensibly detecting the inherent perfection of objects. In both cases, an objective universality is likewise presupposed.

In *common sense* philosophy, it is assumed that there exists a universal human nature, understood in both physiological and moral terms, such that when we correctly judge something to be beautiful, we are *in fact* aligning our individual judgment with this nature. In rationalism, the concept of perfection ultimately expresses a structural conformity between cognition and reality: each subject empirically cognises from a particular perspective and in a partial manner, but the presupposition of common principles of intelligibility allows us to maintain that different representations of reality are representations of the same thing –namely, an object whose intelligibility is possible due to the order or harmony among all things. Thus, my judgment of taste is *true* when it effectively corresponds to the harmony and order that make intelligibility possible, which is experienced as pleasure by those who *succeed* in judging according to taste.

These are ways of understanding that a valid judgment of taste is one in which an objective conformity occurs –either with human nature in particular or with nature in general. In both cases, therefore, if two people dispute matters of taste, at least one of them effectively lacks this faculty, even though it may not always be easy –or even possible– to determine who genuinely possesses taste.

Taste, therefore, just like beauty, truly *exists* as an objective fact, even if our ability to discern it remains uncertain and contingent.

3. The critique of taste is not an aesthetics

The concept of *critique* and *criticism* emerges in modernity precisely within the Anglo-Saxon tradition and exerts a fundamental influence on Kant’s intellectual development. In the aesthetic domain, Kant incorporates into his philosophy the core idea of this tradition –namely, that taste is not subject to prescriptive rules. However, in his thought, we find a radicalisation of this idea.

Although the tradition acknowledges that we cannot resolve a dispute in matters of taste by appealing to rules or precepts, it simultaneously presupposes that there are correct, successful, or true judgments of taste. Kant, by contrast, questions whether an understanding of the critical capacity of taste can lead us to accept such an idea, for having taste does not consist in actually possessing taste or in having *good* taste in contrast to others who would lack it. His reflection critically re-examines the very formulation of this problem: it is not merely that good taste cannot be taught or determined by rules, but rather that it does not properly exist as a psychological faculty or a natural state within human nature or society.

What truly exists is the individual *claim* [*Anspruch*] to possess taste, a claim that can only be justified through transcendental idealism and the rational concept of the supersensible.

Precisely due to the influence of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, from the late 1760s and early 1770s onwards, Kant repeatedly upholds the thesis that the principles of taste do not function as precepts, criteria, or rules according to which the faculty of judgment that is taste could be governed (for example, *Refl.* 1989, AA 16: 115ff.). Taste does not admit of doctrine but rather of critique⁴. There can be no *doctrine* capable of determining which representation will produce in us a universal feeling of pleasure.

This is the fundamental idea present in the well-known note at A 21 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant declares the futility of Baumgarten’s plan to reduce the critical judgment of the beautiful to rational principles, precisely because philosophy cannot provide rules by which this faculty should be governed, as so-called aesthetics seeks to do. We know from a parallel text that this position is dependent on the influence of *Elements of Criticism* by Home: “Allein richtiger hat Home die Ästhetik Kritik genannt, da sie keine Regeln a priori giebt, die das Urtheil hinreichend bestimmen” (*Log*, AA 09: 15). The passage at A 21, presented in the context of the Transcendental Aesthetic of the first *Critique*, aims to reject the use of the term “aesthetics” to designate the philosophical treatment of taste and beauty. Certainly, in the second edition (B 35ff.), Kant introduces clarifications to this passage, but none implies a retraction of this idea, as if the discovery of the possibility of *a priori* principles of taste in the late 1780s had led him to resume the rationalist project of an

³ For the concept of critique and criticism in the seventeenth century, see Tonelli’s classic study (1954: 138–144).

⁴ V-Lo/Philippi, AA, 24, 359; V-Lo/Philippi, AA, 24, 344; V-Anth/Parow, AA, 25, 385; V-Anth/Collins, AA, 25, 175s., 194; *Refl.* 764, AA 15: 333; *Refl.* 622, AA 15: 269.

aesthetics⁵ –that is, a discipline that would provide rules or principles according to which taste, or rather good taste, could be corrected, normatively defined, or discerned.

In fact, in the *First Introduction* to the third *Critique*, Kant explicitly denies the possibility of an aesthetics understood as a science (EEKU, AA 20: 222), precisely because the “aesthetic” to which the work refers has nothing to do with the relation between representation and the object but exclusively with the subject: “Wir werden die Kritik dieses Vermögens in Ansehung der ersteren Art Urtheile nicht *Ästhetik* (gleichsam Sinnenlehre), sondern *Kritik der ästhetischen Urtheilskraft* nennen” (EEKU, AA 20: 247). Despite Kant’s clarity on this matter, we are still accustomed to seeing critical studies of this work titled something along the lines of *Kant’s Aesthetics*⁶.

In accordance with this formulation of the problem, whereby the work contains a *critique* of taste but not an *aesthetics*, Kant repeatedly insists on the idea that the Analytic of the Beautiful sets out and justifies the *a priori* principles of taste –that is, the normative conditions that universally and necessarily define the faculty of taste as such, or in general. However, this does not imply that such conditions can be used by the individual who judges to determine *in concreto* whether their judgment is a genuine judgment of taste. Thus, what follows from these principles is precisely the thesis that the individual cannot decide whether their judgment of taste is true. This is not a deficiency of the theory but rather its positive contribution:

Unter einem Princip des Geschmacks würde man einen Grundsatz verstehen, unter dessen Bedingung man den Begriff eines Gegenstandes subsumiren, und alsdann durch einen Schluß herausbringen könnte, daß er schön sey. Das ist aber schlechterdings unmöglich. Den Bestimmungsgrund ihres Urtheils können sie nicht von der Kraft der Beweisgründe, sondern nur von der Reflexion des Subjects über seinen eigenen Zustand (der Lust oder Unlust), mit Abweisung aller Vorschriften und Regeln, erwarten. (AA 05: 285s.)⁷

Now, Kant is not denying the possibility of principles of taste; rather, he is clarifying how these principles, as set out in the work, should *not* be understood⁸. Despite the claims of art critics who reason subtly [*vernünfteln*] about the correctness and refinement of our judgments of taste in order to formulate a universal principle that determines such judgments, this remains an impossible endeavour. The critique of taste is not a science insofar as it is an *aesthetics*, but rather insofar as it is a *transcendental critique of taste* –that is, a *philosophical critique of taste*– and in this respect, it must be limited to deriving “die Möglichkeit einer solchen Beurtheilung von der Natur dieser Vermögen, als Erkenntnisvermögen überhaupt,” so that “[s]ie soll das subjective Princip des Geschmacks, als ein Princip a priori der Urtheilskraft, entwickeln und rechtfertigen” (AA 05: 286). Therefore, the critique of taste is a second-order form of knowledge, which does not focus on particular beautiful objects or particular judgments of taste, but rather on the possibility of this faculty as such [*überhaupt*].

4. The Deduction of Judgments of Taste and the concept of *sensus communis*

In another work (Sánchez-Rodríguez 2013), I have argued that the reason why we find multiple versions of the deduction of the *a priori* principle of taste in Kant lies in the circumstances surrounding the drafting of the work.⁹ Sections such as the Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment, both Introductions, and the Analytic of the Sublime were written after the Analytic of the Beautiful, in a process during which Kant refined and deepened his conceptions while drafting the sheets he sent to the scribe, incorporating more mature versions in the later sections –without, however, revising the earlier ones, which gradually became somewhat outdated. This explains why the version of the deduction found in the Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment revisits the same problems that the deduction presented in §§ 34–38 had seemingly resolved, while also developing the arguments of the earlier versions in a novel way.

According to Kant, a judgment of taste does not genuinely claim validity insofar as it is successful, true, or actually conforms to the judgments of others, but solely and exclusively insofar as it *claims* such conformity. However, this is not a case like judgments of cognition, where, once they are valid, they may subsequently turn out to be materially true or false. For Kant, a valid judgment of taste is neither true nor false, neither correct nor mistaken, and if it were to be verified as such, it would only be insofar as it had ceased to be a

⁵ Kemal (1992: 21) interprets Kant’s modification as allowing for indeterminate rules of taste, though Kant’s own clarification suggests otherwise. Aesthetics, in Kant’s sense, can only refer to transcendental aesthetics or an aesthetics of psychological significance (B 36), ruling out its application to the third Critique. Kant was reconciling his earlier statement with his new project of a critique of taste, which includes *a priori* principles but not as determinate rules of judgment. On the historical development of this issue in Kant’s thought, see Sánchez-Rodríguez 2010: 86–89.

⁶ Parret (2013) exemplifies the tendency to frame Kant’s work within aesthetics, while others react against the prevailing Kantian scholarship of Guyer (1997) and Crawford (1970, 1980), a trend Crowther (2010) labels “interminabilism.” The Anglo-Saxon tradition frequently reconstructs Kant’s “aesthetics” by analysing various texts that, in my view, actually support abandoning this conception and its associated idea of “good taste.” Kemal (1992: 1, 51ff.) sees Kant as asking how one knows when an aesthetic judgment is successfully made. He argues that Kant’s critique of taste establishes true criteria for correct judgments of taste: “he also sets out what the appropriate standards of success are” (1992: 37). See also Crawford (1970, 1980).

⁷ See also AA 05: 191.

⁸ KU, AA 05: 346f.: «Allein wir haben gezeigt, daß es auch Gründe des Wohlgefallens *a priori* gebe, die also mit dem Princip des Rationalismus zusammen bestehen können, ungeachtet sie nicht in *bestimmte Begriffe* gefaßt werden können».

⁹ On this issue, see also Nuria Sánchez Madrid 2011: 11–36, as well as Tonelli (1954).

judgment of taste.¹⁰ The deduction of taste displaces the concept of good taste insofar as Kant demonstrates the volatility of the concept of a successful or correct judgment: first, because it is impossible to determine when a judgment of taste actually is such; second, not only because it is impossible to detect true taste, but because no such thing exists. In human experience, there exists nothing but each individual's claim that their own judgment is genuinely a judgment of taste – a claim that is valid precisely insofar as it is asserted as such.

The clearest textual support for this interpretation can be found in the *Analytic*, § 8:

Das Geschmacksurtheil selber *postulirt* nicht jedermanns Einstimmung [...]. Die allgemeine Stimme ist also nur eine Idee [...]. Daß der, welcher ein Geschmacksurtheil zu fällen glaubt, in der That dieser Idee gemäß urtheile, kann ungewiß seyn; aber daß er es doch darauf beziehe, mithin daß es ein Geschmacksurtheil seyn solle, kündigt er durch den Ausdruck der Schönheit an. Für sich selbst aber kann er durch das bloße Bewusstseyn der Absonderung alles dessen, was zum Angenehmen und Guten gehört, von dem Wohlgefallen, was ihm noch übrig bleibt, davon gewiß werden; und das ist alles, wozu er sich die Beystimmung von jedermann verspricht: ein Anspruch, wozu unter diesen Bedingungen er auch berechtigt seyn würde, wenn er nur wider sie nicht öfter fehlte und darum ein irriges Geschmacksurtheil fällte. (AA 5: 216)

For every individual, it remains uncertain whether their judgment of taste is successful –that is, whether their judgment is indeed shared by others and thus effectively conforms to a *common sense*. However, if one claims that their judgment is a judgment of taste when expressing that they are confronted with beauty, without relying on restrictive conditions such as sensation or determinative conditions such as a concept, then their judgment *ought to be* [seyn soll] a judgment of taste. This is because what normatively constitutes the possibility of such a judgment is the *a priori* and ideal reference to this universal voice, not actual conformity with it –something that is, in any case, impossible.

There are two levels of indeterminacy or uncertainty in this thesis.

First, someone who believes himself to be making a judgment of taste may be mistaken about whether they are indeed expressing beauty and referring to the idea of universal communicability, precisely because empirical introspection is fallible. Only in this case can a judgment of taste turn out to be mistaken –that is, if, despite the belief regarding one's own attitude¹¹, the judgment is not purely grounded in mere subjective reflection. Just as it is absolutely impossible, in each case, to determine through the experience provided by the keenest introspection whether what has motivated an action in accordance with duty has truly been the representation or consciousness of the moral law (*Grundlegung*, AA 04: 407), so too is it impossible, in the case of judgments of taste, to know whether what we take to be a judgment of taste is not, in reality, a judgment about the agreeable or the good, which surreptitiously presents itself to us as a pure judgment of taste.¹²

Second, a judgment of taste that abstracts from all sensation (judgment of the agreeable) and from any concept of reason (judgment of the good) is specifically different. In such a case, the subject who judges makes a judgment of taste insofar as, from their individual position, they *refer to* an intersubjective community. However, this does not imply that my judgment of taste is necessarily shared to a greater or lesser extent, nor that I am correct in regarding my judgment as such. In the feeling of the good, we also find a claim to universal assent. However, in this latter case, the intersubjective validity contained in the judgment of what is good ultimately derives from an objective law of practical reason, through which this claim presents itself as an effective and determinative command for every subject insofar as they are rational (AA 5: 291, 319ff., 356). In the case of taste, by contrast, the subject claims this intersubjective assent without, however, being able to guarantee that others will coincide with their position.

The same theory is expressed in § 22, in the context of the concept of the exemplary necessity of the beautiful:

Also ist der Gemeinsinn, von dessen Urtheil ich mein Geschmacksurtheil hier als ein Beyspiel angebe und weswegen ich ihm *exemplarische* Gültigkeit beylege, eine bloße idealische Norm, unter

¹⁰ A particular act of judgment must be able to presuppose the principle that underlies it, even if it ultimately does not turn out to be a correct or successful judgment of taste. Wieland (2001: 243–57) has argued for the essential *bivalence* of judgments of taste, in such a way that both failed and successful judgments would equally presuppose the principle of purposiveness without an end. Wieland's interpretation is fundamentally correct and pioneering in the hermeneutic approach employed in this study, but it may be more accurate to abandon entirely the concept of correctness or success, as well as its negative counterpart, in order to present Kant's theory.

¹¹ It is not, therefore, a case of someone who "immer nur auf das Genießen ausgehen [...] sich gern alles Urtheilens überheben" (AA 05: 207).

¹² Kant's statements on good taste and the resolution of disputes about taste should be interpreted within the distinction between free and adherent beauty. He does not address the conditions for having taste in contrast to others, as Crawford (1970: 507ff., 510) suggests, but rather the conditions for making a proper judgment of taste, distinct from judgments of the agreeable or the good. This is evident in Kant's claim that a judgment of beauty must be free from interest: "Man sieht leicht, daß es auf das, was ich aus dieser Vorstellung in mir selbst mache, nicht auf das, worin ich von der Existenz des Gegenstandes abhängen, ankomme, um zu sagen, er sey schön, und zu beweisen, ich habe Geschmack" (AA 05: 205). In § 8, he clarifies that abstraction from sensation is necessary for subjective universality: "niemand in die Gedanken kommen würde, diesen Ausdruck zu gebrauchen" (AA 05: 214). Kant asserts that disputes about taste can be resolved when one subject abstracts from the concept or sensation while another does not (AA 05: 229–231). His notion of a correct judgment of taste refers to pure judgments of taste rather than a hierarchy among them. Thus, it is possible to determine when a judgment is not pure—when influenced by a sensible or intellectual interest—but impossible, in principle, to know with certainty that one's judgment is purely a judgment of taste. On the implications of this distinction for the theory of art, see Lemos (2017).

deren Voraussetzung man ein Urtheil, welches mit ihr zusammenstimmte und das in demselben ausgedrückte Wohlgefallen an einem Object, für jedermann mit Recht zur Regel machen könnte: weil zwar das Princip nur subjectiv, dennoch aber, für subjectiv-allgemein (eine jedermann nothwendige Idee) angenommen, was die Einhelligkeit verschiedener Urtheilenden betrifft, gleich einem objectiven, allgemeine Beystimmung fordern könnte; wenn man nur sicher wäre, darunter richtig subsumirt zu haben" (AA 05: 239).

A judgment of taste can only be made as an exemplary case of a norm that, however, cannot be adduced; if my judgment were to effectively presuppose it –that is, if I could be certain that I had correctly subsumed my judgment under this norm– then my judgment would indeed conform to *common sense* and could *objectively* demand the assent of others, like any *other* judgment of *cognition*.

Kant is not engaged in a frustrating and uncertain attempt to explain the possibility of successful judgments of taste, as Crawford thinks (1980: 291, 293); rather, he is positively expounding the specific nature of the intersubjective validity of this type of judgment and introducing a second sense in which we must understand how a judgment *presupposes* a principle. In the case of judgments of taste, this presupposition occurs insofar as, in individual judgment, we claim that ours is a judgment of taste, as is made clear in the continuation of the cited passage: "Diese unbestimmte Norm eines Gemeinsinns wird von uns wirklich vorausgesetzt: das beweiset unsere Anmaßung Geschmacksurtheile zu fällen" (id.). In response to Kant's argumentative strategy, some interpreters express perplexity, stemming from their failure to recognise Kant's thesis. Once one is erroneously convinced that Kant, like the Anglo-Saxon philosophy of *common sense*, is maintaining that there truly are examples of good taste, only that we cannot determine with certainty which they are (Kemal 1992: 87; Ameriks 1983), the interpretation can only oscillate between two positions: either reading Kant's statements on the impossibility of determining the correctness of judgments of taste as inadequate solutions to a problem that he never intended to solve (see, for example, Kemal 1992: 98), or reading –contrary to Kant's own words– the conditions of possibility of taste as criteria that allow us to determine the correctness of the judgment (see, for example, Kemal 1992: 95).

5. Autonomy and Disagreement in Taste

It must therefore be acknowledged that contingency and fallibility are essential to the logic of taste. Although the representation must serve as an occasion for us to perceive in the mind a subjective causality in accordance with purpose, the ground of the feeling of pleasure cannot reside in the form of the representation, in its conformity with the play of the imagination, or in the *actual* psychological relation between the cognitive faculties involved in each case in the act of judgment¹³.

This concept of the specific validity of judgments of taste entirely surpasses the concept of good taste. One who judges according to taste lays claim to having (good) taste and seeks the assent of others, even through the supposition that their judgment is an example of good taste that ought to receive approval, in contrast to others who lack taste. This pertains to the phenomenological level of the *ars critica* exercised by taste and to how the subject considers their own act of judgment. However, at the philosophical level of the transcendental critique of taste, Kant maintains that it is a faculty that is *claimed*, not *attained* or *possessed*, regardless of who the subject is or the empirical conditions that define the particular position from which they carry out their act of judgment.

This conception finds its strongest and most mature foundation in the Dialectic of Aesthetic Judgment. Communicability of feeling in the judgment of taste is based on the possibility of communicability among human beings as rational beings, insofar as this is grounded in an idea underlying this communicability, that is, the hope "durch wechselseitigen Widerstand der Urtheile Einhelligkeit derselben hervorzubringen" (AA 05: 238), or the aspiration of casting light on disputes of taste.

The accord among human beings that is presupposed in debates on taste arises, in reality, from the idea of universal human reason, developed in the concept of *sensus communis*. Therefore, taste rests on *common* or *universal sense* insofar as this concept is considered an *ideal norm* of reason. In § 22, this norm is described as a principle or idea, which should be interpreted as "subjective-allgemein" (KU, AA 05: 239), even though the unresolved question remains here concerning whether this idea "in der That nur eine Vernunftforderung sey eine solche Einhelligkeit der Sinnesart hervorzubringen, und das Sollen, d. i. die objective Nothwendigkeit des Zusammenfließens des Gefühls von jedermann mit jedes seinem besonders, nur die Möglichkeit hierin einträchtig zu werden bedeute, und das Geschmacksurtheil nur von Anwendung dieses Principis ein Beyspiel aufstelle" (KU, AA 05: 240). In § 40, *sensus communis* is defined as follows:

Unter dem *sensus communis* aber muß man die Idee eines *gemeinschaftlichen Sinnes*, d. i. eines Beurteilungsvermögens verstehen, welches in seiner Reflexion auf die Vorstellungsart jedes andern

¹³ Paragraph § 21 has sparked debates about its coherence with different versions of the deduction. According to AA 05: 23832–23910, among various proportions between cognitive faculties, there must be *one* suited to cognition in general, *detectable* by feeling without a concept. When isolated from its context –even within the *Analytic of the Beautiful*– this passage aligns with rationalist aesthetics, where feeling serves as a confused way of detecting perfection or proportion, whether in representation or in psychological faculties. A comparison with a later passage clarifies Kant's position: "so sieht man wohl, daß in einem blos reflectirenden Urtheile Einbildungskraft und Verstand in dem Verhältnisse, in welchem sie in der Urtheilskraft überhaupt gegen einander stehen müssen, mit dem Verhältnisse, in welchem sie bey einer gegebenen Wahrnehmung wirklich stehen, verglichen, betrachtet werden" (EEKU, AA 20: 220). This indicates that Kant refers not to a determinate relation between faculties but to their reference to an idea. See also López Molina (1992).

in Gedanken (*a priori*) Rücksicht nimmt, um *gleichsam* an die gesamte Menschenvernunft sein Urtheil zu halten, und dadurch der Illusion zu entgehen, die aus subjectiven Privatbedingungen, welche leicht für objectiv gehalten werden könnten, auf das Urtheil nachtheiligen Einfluß haben würde (AA 05: 293).

Through the concept of *sensus communis*, *criticism* no longer designates the objective fact of a judgment commonly shared due to the psychological or empirical conformity of human nature; rather, it refers to a rational idea for the heteronomy of the power of Judgment (EEKU 20: 203; KU, 05: 259). Therefore, any principle of *reflective aesthetic judgment* legislates over how we ought to *judge* and the use of the faculties involved in judgment. Thus, our singular judgment holds validity insofar as, when we judge, we are not actually asserting anything about the world, nor about other actual judging subjects or their agreement with our judgment; rather, we are reflecting on our own singular act of judgment. The subjective principle of taste merely defines how we ought to proceed in our judgment, in which we must take into account the standpoint of any other and subject our partial and individual position to “gesamte Menschenvernunft”. Ultimately, this represents the inversion of the *common sense* tradition. If we lack the starting point provided by transcendental idealism and cannot conceive of the universality designated by this concept other than as an empirical generalisation, we then run the risk inherent in all discourse concerning *good taste*: namely, that of passing off a partial and phenomenal position as commonly shared taste, such that any divergence from conventional *normal aesthetics* comes to be regarded as *bad taste*.

Only the rational and unconditioned concept of the supersensible can provide the ultimate foundation for the principle of purposiveness (AA 05: 34014–15)¹⁴, which does not serve to cognise anything about the object or the sensible nature of humanity, but through which alone a judgment of taste can claim universal intersubjective validity (AA 05: 339ff.). According to Kant, if we disregard this concept, then we not only deny that there is an *a priori* principle that grounds the judgment, but we are also forced to admit that “ein Geschmacksurtheil nur sofern für richtig gehalten zu werden verdiene, weil es sich trifft, daß viele in Ansehung desseblen übereinkommen [...], weil die Subjecte zufälliger Weise gleichförmig organisirt seyen, oder man müßte annehmen, daß das Geschmacksurtheil eigentlich ein verstecketes Vernunfturtheil uber die [...] Vollkommenheit sey” (AA 05: 346)¹⁵.

With this statement, the perplexity surrounding the specific nature of taste found in empiricism and rationalism is definitively overcome, a perplexity arising from the failure to recognise the antinomy in this domain of human reason and the inability to resolve it –something that, according to Kant, is only possible through transcendental idealism. A judgment of taste is neither the result of a contingent and actual agreement among subjects nor of a confused cognition of the perfection of the object. In both cases, it would ultimately be a judgment of cognition –an empirical judgment in the first case, a transcendent rational judgment in the second. Neither of these theories, due to their inability to properly ground the *a priori* principle of taste, can adequately account for the common experience of this faculty by subjects. For having taste is expressed not only through the claim to conformity or correctness in judgment but also through *dissent*, even with respect to an actual community of subjects who will never share my point of view. This is a property that any aesthetic theory must acknowledge, yet in the end, it is compelled to overcome it in one way or another, that is, the autonomy of individual judgment: “Der Geschmack macht bloß auf Autonomie Anspruch. Fremde Urtheile sich zum Bestimmungsgrunde des seingigen zu machen, wäre Heteronimie” (AA 05: 282).

One who judges according to taste does not in any way claim to be judging as people commonly do in society; rather, quite the opposite –they claim to have taste because they claim that others *ought* to judge as they do. Now, in this, it becomes exemplarily clear what a judgment of taste consists of for Kant and why the concept of *good taste* is useless, when we recognise that there is a natural dialectic in the very attitude by which an individual claims to have taste in contrast to other, *something they cannot do without at the same time granting others this faculty and, therefore, their capacity for dissent*:

Er sagt daher, die Sache ist schön; und rechnet nicht etwa darum auf Anderer Einstimmung in sein Urtheil des Wohlgefallens, weil er sie mehrmalen mit dem seingigen einstimmig befunden hat, sondern *fordert* es von ihnen. Er tadelt sie, wenn sie anders urtheilen, und *spricht ihnen den Geschmack ab, von dem er doch verlangt, daß sie ihn haben sollen* (AA 05: 212s., *cursiv my own*).

Precisely because a judgment of taste is neither a judgment of the understanding nor of reason (AA 05: 2851–2), one does not allow oneself to be convinced by any norm that defines what ought to be legitimately pleasurable, such as those offered by classical critics like Batteux or Lessing (AA 5: 284), nor by what commonly pleases people of good taste. Naturally, one might act like the majority precisely “um nicht für geschmacklos angesehen zu werden” (AA 5: 284), but in that case, one would not be genuinely claiming to have good taste; rather, one would be adopting an attitude that is specifically different from that of taste, which could well belong to the empirical-practical domain, such as the attitude of prudence. A negative judgment from others may, in any case, give us pause for thought, but “niemals aber von der Unrichtigkeit desselben überzeugen”

¹⁴ Paul Guyer (1997: 302–307) rejects Kant’s use of the theory of the supersensible as inconsistent and dispensable. He distinguishes between a merely “epistemological” grounding in the Analytic and an “ontological” interpretation in the Dialectic. These divisions do not seem to correspond to Kant’s philosophy: there is neither a grounding of the judgment of taste based *merely* on the *psychology* of cognition, nor does the concept of the supersensible serve Kant to address the ontological problem of what *truly is*. Rather, the Analytic and the Dialectic serve to explain the possibility of the *a priori* of taste through an analysis and a critique of the human kind of cognition (on this issue, see my *anonymised*). For a counter-interpretation of Guyer, see also Brandt (1989a; 1989b).

¹⁵ See also AA 05: 282^{11–17}.

(AA 05: 284), “denn ich muss unmittelbar an der Vorstellung desselben die Lust empfinden und sie kann mir durch keine Beweisgründe angeschwätzt werden” (AA 05: 285).

It makes no difference whether I am a young poet of dubious taste (AA 05: 282) or a renowned Calderón de la Barca, one who judges according to taste does not allow themselves to be intimidated by experts who claim to know what (good) taste truly consists in: “ich stopfe mir die Ohren zu, mag keine Gründe und kein Vernünfteln hören und werde eher annehmen, daß jene Regeln der Kritiker falsch seien, oder wenigstens hier nicht der Fall ihrer Anwendung sei” (AA 05: 284)¹⁶.

In this article, I have argued that Kant breaks with the tradition of aesthetics and with a concept inherently tied to it, namely, that of good taste or correct taste. This thinker not only acknowledges, alongside the Anglo-Saxon traditions of *criticism* and *common sense*, that it is impossible to demonstrate who possesses taste, but also maintains that there is nothing to be demonstrated in this regard. For taste does not admit of degrees, as if it were a psychological faculty or a matter of fact, such as social recognition at a given historical moment and under specific empirical circumstances. The principles of taste should not be understood as prescriptive rules; rather, they are second-order principles that do not concern how we ought to judge in each case but rather what properly constitutes the specific possibility of taste as such. What follows from the correct interpretation of these principles is a thesis that challenges the aesthetic tradition and the concept of good taste, for through its principles and the way it defines their origin, scope, and validity, it asserts that taste should not be understood as a judgment about objects or about subjects understood as an actual community. Taste is valid insofar as, through it, we reflect on our own act of judgment, independently of how the world is or how others are. In doing so, we judge that our act of judgment ought to claim the assent of others –an assent that can only be justified through the rational concept of the supersensible. All efforts aimed at extracting an aesthetics from these ideas not only contribute to reading into Kant a classicism absent from his work but also fail to recognise the philosophical significance of this conception of intersubjective validity and its radical novelty in the history of philosophy.

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¹⁶ See also AA 05: 237^{10–15}.

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