

Claudia Maria Meadows

PHIL 3350 Philosophy of Art

Dr. Westfall, Fall 2020

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*

John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields*

What is beauty? “Taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful.”¹ This explanation of the beautiful is the first moment and the introduction to the world of beauty how Immanuel Kant describes it in his book *Critique of Judgment*. The idea of beauty has nothing to do with definitions which come from the art historical or critical analysis of the matter what is purely interested in the art object and the artist. The philosophical matter which is here from interest, is totally based on theories by Kant and defines beauty in a way of subjectivity which leads to taste.

How do we receive an object? For example a poem, we are reading or listening to it and we take in with our senses and become aware of its existence. Then our mind tries to imagine, understand, and make a judgment, if we like it or not. *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae, the reader's sense of perception is to analyze the words of the poem and processes it with its mind. But this would be going after a concept which tells us in general terms, “This is a poem and this are the words of a poem”. This wouldn't be the idea of beauty at all, just a process of information. Kant's theory goes much further into the human mind and brings out an inner feeling for the beauty of the words and for the poem itself.

Like already mentioned, the beautiful doesn't require objectivity, it is totally subjective and universal because there is no reason why it wouldn't be beautiful. We don't require any experience to find something beautiful, means we don't need any knowledge about the object. For example, we don't need to know that the poem was written in World War I and it doesn't please not only veterans or people who are interested in history. In beauty, it should be beautiful for everyone, regardless of knowledge or status. Like Kant mentions in his second moment, “The beautiful is that which pleases universally without (requiring) a concept.”² Understanding the historical causes of the war or if the poet was in the war and who composed this poem, is not significant for the beauty of the piece.

¹Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 286.

²Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 293.

Necessary is just an inner feeling which can be overwhelming.

“Beauty is the form of possessiveness of an object, so far as this is perceived in it without any representation of a purpose.”³ Kant tells us, we don't need a certain purpose to find something beautiful. A purpose serves as a representation of satisfying a certain need or desire in a way where the object becomes a tool to satisfy our knowledge about certain events or places in history, like the description of the poem's flower fields or the historical time line of World War I. In our conscious mind, it shouldn't give us the desire of feeling pain or pleasure in a way which one would call sensuous. The feeling of sensuous is the desire of a pure selfish feeling of satisfying your own desires in a way which would be interested instead of disinterested and complementing the beautiful.

In the fourth moment, Kant writes about common sense which is the harmony between imagination and understanding. Collecting sensation with your senses and then trying to understand it that is vital for a human mind, even that understanding has a concept and imagination not. But we still need both to identify the beauty of an object, otherwise we just reading a poem like *In Flanders Fields* and can't even recognize the beauty of it because we don't know what beauty is. “Hence it is only under the presupposition that there is a common sense (by which we do not understand an external sense, but the effect resulting from the free play of our cognitive powers)-it is only under this presupposition, I say, that the judgment of taste can be laid down.”⁴

Kant defines genius as an innate attribute which lies inside of the artist and is part of natural talent. Art cannot be studied like science and is a priori within the genius of a person and is different from science what Kant didn't consider genius (Albert Einstein). Art is the only discipline that is genius in the Kantian way and should be considered as superior overall the other disciplines. “Genius is the talent (or natural gift) which gives the rule to art.”⁵ “Thus genius properly consists in the happy relation,

³Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 301.

⁴Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 302.

⁵Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 314.

which no science can teach and no industry can learn.”⁶

Poetry is the highest form of art and falls into the category arts of speech with oratory and rhetoric which produces beauty within words.

“We are the Dead. Short days ago

We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset

glow,

Loved and were loved, and

now we lie

In Flanders fields.”

John McCrae

⁶Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 320.