CHAPTER- IV

KANT'S THEORY OF ART

IV.1 Some Preliminaries

As we have seen in the first chapter, aesthetics comprises both a study of beauty in nature and a study of beauty in art. Pre-Kantian aesthetics provided primacy to the latter. Post Kantian aesthetics starting from Hegel treated aesthetics and philosophy of art as being “virtually synonymous” (cf, Allison 2001, 271). What is significant about Kant’s engagement with aesthetics is that, unlike most of his predecessors and almost all of his successors, he focused his attention on beauty in nature. This is because, as we have seen, in the Chapter III the aim of Kant’s engagement with aesthetics was to ground both necessity found in nature and freedom without which the moral domain can hardly exist within a certain facet of human experience and aesthetics, according to him, could foot the bill. It is not, therefore surprising that he found the experience of natural beauty to be paradigmatic.

However, Kant did not neglect beauty in art completely. Though he preoccupies himself with art in the sections from 43 to 53 of the third Critique there are references to art in the preceding sections despite they being sporadic and sketchy. This has led some Kantian scholars to think that Kant’s concern with art is too peripheral to constitute a philosophical account of beauty in art. For instance, maintaining that Kant was not
concerned with what is now the central concern of aesthetics, namely, art, Kirwan says, “While Kant has many interesting things to say about art, the construction of a philosophy of art is manifestly not the object of the Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgement. It is now generally acknowledged that to read Kant’s work translating each proposition concerning ‘beauty’ or ‘taste’ into one about the grounds of our enjoyment or evaluation of art can only lead to conclusion that Kant has, at the very least, started from the wrong place” (2004, 12). It may also be noted that upholding in this connection a view akin to, if not identical with, that of Kirwan, Allison maintains that Kant’s theory of art, that is, fine art, is extrinsically related to his theory of beauty which is nature-centered. Allison accounts for this fact by claiming that Kant’s primary concern is with aesthetic judgements and hence his aesthetics was reception-aesthetics and not creation aesthetics even while engaging with the relation between artistic production and genius (cf, 2001, 217). In the opinion of this thesis these views regarding the marginal character of Kant’s concern with art vis-à-vis Kant’s whole aesthetic framework are off the mark, as our discussion in this chapter will show. In fact, Kant himself has pre-empted such a talk of marginality of art to his aesthetic concerns when, speaking of the objects of natural beauty and objects of artistic beauty, he says, “in the judgement of mere [pure] taste [they] could scarcely contend with one another for a superiority” (1952, §42, 159/300 AE). In fact, Kant uses the word ‘nature’ in more than one way with the result some of them include objects of the art world (cf, Gacyk 1998, 41-42).

The view that art is of marginal interest to Kant because his aesthetics is nature-Centered is based on the alleged fact that Kant considers nature to be aesthetically superior to art. It is true that according to Kant the beautiful objects of nature arouse a direct interest in morality in a way works of art can not. In Kant’s own words, “the
interest in the *beautiful* of art … gives no evidence at all of a habit of mind attached to the morally good, or even inclined that way. But … to take an *immediate interest* in the beauty of *nature* … is always a mark of a good soul” (1952, §42, 157/298 AE). Hence, “The superiority which natural beauty has over that of art … accords with the refined and well-grounded habits of thought of all men who have cultivated their moral feeling” (*Ibid*, §42, 158/299 AE). However, the so called aesthetic superiority of nature over art is based on something extrinsic to aesthetic factors, namely, moral considerations. Secondly, since moral judgements that are judgements about morally good are determinate judgements, pure judgements of taste, that is, judgements about the beautiful can not be so organically linked to them as to adjudicate between natural beauty and artistic beauty. Consequently, as Gracyk points out, “this claim of nature’s superiority to fine art is not a general endorsement of the superiority of natural beauty and it is consistent with Kant’s position that in a pure judgement neither is superior” (1998, 43-44). In other words, valorization of nature over art conflicts with the very idea of a pure judgement of taste as Kant construes it. Further, Kant’s contention regarding the superior status of natural beauty mentioned above is off set by his own statement to the contrary: “in all fine art the essential element consists in the form which is final for observation and for estimating. Here the pleasure is at the same time culture, and disposes the soul to ideas, making it thus susceptible of such pleasure and entertainment in greater abundance” (1952, §52, 190-191/326 AE). Finally, if the beauty of nature is superior to that of art Kant has to face the question “Why do we need art when there is nature?” that is to say “When we have superior kind of beauty in nature why do we seek to produce beauty which is supposed to be inferior to that of nature?” In fact, there are enough hints in Kant’s own writings that purport to tilt the balance in favor of art *vis-à-vis* nature,
aesthetically speaking. Kemal very ably brings out and elaborates on such hints. According to him there is enough evidence in Kant to show the following:

a) We valorize art because the constructive and purposive character of aesthetic object is more clearly seen in art “[T]hat we can at all understand nature when it is beautiful is because of its analogy with art in general and with fine art in particular” (Kemal 1992, 109).

b) Works of art have more capacity for embodying imaginative freedom than are objects of nature.

c) Art can transform what is given by nature in such a way that it can outclass nature, as Kant acknowledges when he says “the material [that] can be borrowed by us from nature … be worked up by us into something else-namely, what surpasses nature” (1952, §49, 176/314 AE).

d) Works of art “have more extensively conceptualized universality than do natural objects” (Kemal 1992, 115).

e) Even while having its basis in nature art is indispensable part of culture such that “our cultural experience and responses to art circumscribe our approach to nature and its beauty” (Ibid, 124).

So much regarding the criticism that art is peripheral to Kant’s aesthetic concerns.

Another criticism against Kant’s philosophy of art is that Kant’s canvas is too narrow since art based on his reflection on art are based on very limited art forms. And even regarding those limited arts forms his treatment was heavily colored by his own
taste and preferences. For instance, in poetry he heavily inclined towards Milton, Pope, Montaigne and Haller and had no sympathy for Romantic Poetry. But, as Körner says, “Kant’s lack of perception for some works of art [and some art forms] is no reason in itself for condemning his aesthetic theory. This would be as mistaken as the condemnation of Gestalt psychology on the ground that one of its exponents proved to be incapable of perceiving some type of Gestalt” (1955, 193-194).

With these preliminary remarks we are enter into Kant’s theory of art. Central to our discussion of his view are his position on the nature of art and his stand on the value of art.

**IV.2 Kant on the Nature of Art**

We may start our discussion of Kant’s view of the nature of art with a brief look at the way he demarcates art from other areas of human endeavor. According to him, art is practical whereas science is theoretical as art involves practical skill. It is obvious that such a demarcation between art and science is totally arbitrary since science also involves practical skill, particularly in sharpening observations, constructing instruments and designing experiments; also, production of art objects involves theoretical understanding which may though be distinct from its scientific counterpart. To such an arbitrarily drawn distinction Kant’s adds another one when he distinguishes between arts and craft by simply saying that art needs higher degree of talent, thanks to the fact that art objects unlike the products of craft are not determined by a functional concept. This distinction of Kant losses much of its weight when he brings to our mind the fact that successful works of art embody a high level of craftsmanship, best example being the production of
sculpture. Kant seems to be off the mark when he considers the value of a work of craft to be in the function it serves but not the admiration it wins because, of, for instance, its filigree work. However, while placing art on a pedestal higher than that of craft he does not treat all art to be of the same stature. He makes a distinction between mechanical artifacts and aesthetic artifacts. No doubt, both kinds of artifacts are art objects since they are products of a specialized skill and intentional endeavor. However, whereas the former is a product of an effort at actualizing a possible object which answers our needs, cognitive or otherwise, the latter concerns simply the arousal of pleasure. Kant goes further to distinguish between those aesthetic artifacts which provide pleasure in the sense of mere agreeableness and those aesthetic objects which give pleasure which is more than mere agreeableness. The latter fall under the kind designated by the term ‘Fine Art’. In working out his theory of art Kant focuses exclusively on fine art. In other words, fine art, according to Kant, is art proper, with the result Kant’s theory of art is theory of fine art. From now on in our discussion of Kant in this chapter by ‘art’ we mean only fine art, unless otherwise indicated. If objects of mechanical art involve the notion of perfection or non ethical good and aesthetic objects which are not objects of fine art are object of mere agreeableness, objects of fine art embody pure aesthetic pleasure. It is the products of fine art that exhibit beauty on the lines of the Kantian construal as delineated in chapter III. Like beautiful experience of nature the products of fine art provide a kind of pleasure which is located in reflection unlike the pleasure associated with mere liking or agreeableness which is located in sensations. Secondly, as in the case of their natural counterparts the pleasure produced by them is a product of the harmonious and free play between our faculties of imagination and understanding. Thirdly, as in the case of natural beauty, “Fine art … is a mode of representation which is intrinsically final” (1952, §44,
Finally, the universal communicability which characterizes natural beauty becomes more crystallized in the case of objects of fine art because the way of representing in the case of fine art “although devoid of an end, has the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers in the interests of social communication” (Ibid).

The above discussion sketchily has brought out the parallelism between objects of natural beauty and objects of artistic beauty. Let us now start looking at how Kant construes art objects vis-à-vis, beautiful objects of nature. This is important because in Kant’s view the difference between natural beauty and artistic beauty is as important as what unites them.

First of all, according to Kant “A beauty of nature is a beautiful thing; beauty of art is a beautiful representation of a thing” (Ibid, §48, 172/311 AE). This statement of Kant fits into his aesthetics scheme to a limited extent. To be more precise, Kant should have indicated that what an art object represents is not a thing but a thing which is aesthetically perceived and hence a thing which is already an object of representation and not a phenomenal object. Therefore, an object of artistic beauty is a representation of a thing which is already represented; that is, it is a representation of a representation. In other words, an object of art, in the Kantian scheme, is twice removed from a phenomenal object. This remind us of Plato’s characterization of an artistic production as twice removed from reality, though Plato, unlike Kant devalues as an art object for that very reason. Hence, the production of beautiful representations of the representation of the things is a distinctive task of art. Further, as Graham points out, Kant’s statement confines art to only figurative painting. Lyrical poetry is beautiful not because its
representative of something but it is expressive of something. Kant himself goes beyond his representational account of fine art when he goes beyond figurative painting in his account of fine art in terms of aesthetic ideas. Such art forms “are non-visual representations of non-physical things such as love, or death or envy, which it seems clear the literary arts can embody, including, even, lyric poetry. Perhaps a more difficult case is music. Music can be beautiful, but can it be the representation of anything? And surely architecture is functional rather than representative?” (Graham 2005, 22). This means that according to Kant some forms of fine art like figurative painting are representative whereas most of other art forms are expressive, and hence Kant’s own distinction between beautiful objects of nature and beautiful objects of art is inaccurate even from his own point of view.

Secondly, there are certain locutions which are applicable to art objects and not to nature. They are concepts like intentionality, rule-freedom, originality, spontaneity, exemplariness and ineffability. It is not that the negations of these concepts are applicable to nature. It is simply that it does not make sense to apply them or their negation to the beautiful objects of nature. What is most important in this connection is that Kant relates all these concepts to the idea of genius whose role is central to Kant’s theorization of art. Since genius is concerned with the production of art objects Kant’s theory of art transforms the question “What is art?” into “How is art created?” This show how questionable is Allison’s view that Kant’s aesthetics is reception-aesthetics and not creation-aesthetics (cf, Allison 2001, 217). This is not to say that Allison is completely wrong; after all, Kant’s central preoccupation with pure aesthetic judgements about both natural and artistic beauty supports Allison’s view. However, Kant’s focus on genius in the creation of art goes against Allison’s identifications of the central orientation of
Kant’s aesthetics. It is, therefore, reasonable to say that reception-aesthetics and creation aesthetics are two sides of same coin. The significance of work on Kantian means of art consists in displaying how one-sided is its characterization as only reception-centric.

In view of the fact that the concept of genius is the center of gravity of Kant’s theory of art, this chapter discusses in detail Kant’s view of genius in art. However, before we do so, let us look at Kant’s enigmatic statement about the relation between nature and art. The statement runs as follows:

“A product of fine art must be recognized to be art and not nature … nature proved beautiful when it wore the appearance of art; and art can only be termed beautiful, where we are conscious of its being art, while yet it has the appearance of nature” (Kant 1952, §45, 166-167/306 AE). This means that according to Kant, (1) nature is beautiful when it looks like art; (2) art is beautiful if it looks like nature; and (3) a work of art must be recognized as art and not nature. What do these claims add up to?

Taken together (1) and (2) may point to a common ground that underlies both beauty in nature and beauty in art. Central to the common ground is the idea of purposiveness without purpose and hence involving no determinate concept. As Guyer points out, it means that “the processes of appreciation and evaluation which lead to the conclusion that an object, whether a work of art or otherwise, is beautiful, are the same in all cases, and the paradigm for those processes must be that which is furnished by the appreciation and estimation of a natural beauty free of all intervention by concepts” (1994, 275). Two problems arise in connection with such an interpretation which can join (1) and (2) and both the problems concern fine arts. In the case of a work of fine art it may be very difficult not to take into account the purpose behind the creation of a work
of art. Thus a problem arises because such a purpose may be mostly intrinsic to that work and not extrinsic one like a commercial motive. After all, representing a beautiful form may be the purpose of an art work and it is impossible not to take this into account (this problem does not arise in the case of a beautiful object of nature). This problem can be solved by considering representation as purpose to be relevant only for interpreting a work and not evaluating it. As Ranjan Kumar Ghosh points out “to interpret a work of art is not the same as to evaluate it; so in approaching a work of representational painting one might interpret it in terms of its purpose, that is, what it depicts, but its evaluation as a work of art (or beauty of art) is not parasitic on its interpretation. Such a work would be beautiful or not depending as it would on whether or not it pleases by its form alone that is the condition conductive for the harmony between the faculties” (2004, 239). In other words, interpretation involves what is intended whereas evaluation involves what is realized. Further, representation as associated with purpose in art is, to quote McCloskey, “such a generalized notion in Kant’s writing that it could be treated as making … no more than the fact that the artist makes, and does not find or is not ‘given’, the object in question” (quoted in Ghosh 2004, 240, emphasis added). That is the reason why even “non-representational specimens of art such as abstract paintings may also be subsumed under the rubric of ‘representation’” (Ibid). Hence, ‘representation’ is too general a notion to carry the burden of ‘purpose’.

The second problem is that the conjunction of (1) and (2) so interpreted makes Kant’s theory of art ultra-formalist one, consequence of which is Kant is made to derecognize content such as a color to be relevant. Such a construction of Kant’s position does not do justice to Kant who “assumes, a work of art typically has not only a form but also a content which is or is associated with a concept, but precisely in such a way that
both form and content jointly and freely produce the harmony of the higher cognitive faculties in spite of the role of concepts in both the recognition of the general intention making the object a work of fine art and the apprehension of its particular content” (Guyer 1994, 278). It may be noted in this connection that Haskins maintains that Kant does not include color as integral to form since colors can only give us charm and agreeableness. However, Haskins clearly states that “What Kant is explicitly distinguishing design from is not representational or symbolic content … [I]t is not form/content (in the sense of representational content) distinction which underlies Kant’s formalism” (1989, 53). In short, the second problem can be answer by pointing out that Kant’s notion of form is too broad to be of any use to the formalist. As we shall see Kant further enriches his theory of art by supplementing such a broad concept of form with the concept of aesthetic expression.

The conjunction (1) and (2) can also be interpreted without taking into account the common ground of purposiveness. Kant’s contention that nature to be beautiful must look like a work of art must not be taken to mean that nature when beautiful contains art forms but “that a natural form, in order to be beautiful, has to agree with a form we, in our imagination, could have produced freely” (Ruger 2007, 153). Similarly, Kant’s contention that a work of art is beautiful if its look like nature should be taken to mean that a work of art should be like, not as a fabrication involving rules but as a product of spontaneous creation like a pleasing natural phenomenon—‘free formations of nature’. Thus, neither art is a copy of nature nor nature is our projection.

We now came to the claim (3) made by Kant, namely, a work of art must be recognized as art and not as nature. This means that to respond to a work of art
aesthetically we must be conscious that it is art even while it should be seen like nature. One way of understanding this claim of Kant is to look at an art object as a product of conscious intent of the artist. In other words, to be a work of art is to be a product of artist’s intention. Obviously, by no stretch imagination we can associate intention with an object of nature, say, sunset. But at the same time it must be seemed like an object of nature which is spontaneous or in Kant’s words unintentional. Therefore, our experience of an object of art is an experience of an object which is both intended and unintended. This looks like a paradox. Allison point out that there is nothing paradoxical in this (cf, 2001, 275). But there is no need to deny that there is a paradox here. In fact art experience is what it is because of its paradoxicality. However, such a paradox which lies at the heart of our experience is not a paradox in the usual sense. Customary paradoxes are sought by us to be resolved. But we do not seek to resolve the paradox that characterizes our art experience; rather, we leave it because it enlivens the aesthetic dimension of our life.

Whether such a paradox is real or, as Allison thinks, only apparent is less important than the fact that it provides, for Kant, an entry point into the seminal notion of genius which is what draws the line between natural beauty and artistic beauty. This notion effects a perspectival shift from reception-aesthetics to creation-aesthetics in the Kantian thought on art. It is this pivotal idea that we now turn to.

Kant starts his discussion of genius by explicitly stating that “fine arts must necessarily be regarded as arts of genius” (1952, §46, 168/307 AE). To this he adds “The concept of fine art, however, does not permit of the judgement upon the beauty of its product being derived from any rule that has a concept for its determining ground, and
that depends, consequently, on a concept of the way in which the product is possible. Consequently fine art can not of its own self excogitate the rule according to which it is to effectuate its product” (Ibid). Hence, genius according to him, “is a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given” (Ibid). It is genius to which one must trace creativity and originality but since a original work can be idiosyncratic nonsense a work of fine art must avoid this pitfall by proving itself to be exemplary in the sense of being models. Thus, the product of genius must be both original and exemplary. The freedom from rule-governedness is what makes a work of art an artistic production. This is because unlike a straight forward representation it must be suggestive-a point which Kant does not mention but takes for granted. Rulebundness is antithetical to new possibilities of interpretation that may be suggested by a work of art.

At the same time Kant affirms that “a product can never be called ‘art’ unless there is a preceding rule” (Ibid). This means that a work of art is bond by rules. Kant seeks to resolve the contradiction between his two assertions, namely, (1) ‘a work of art is rule free’, and (2) ‘a work of art is rule governed’ by claiming that a work of art is rule free in the sense it is free from manmade rules and it is rule bond in the sense it is bond by rules which nature has given to the genius to which a work of art owes its creation. Hence, “Genius is the innate mental aptitude (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art” (Ibid). Yet a work of art is uniquely a human creation and not a production of nature. A hive constructed by bees might be spellbinding due to its amazing design which no human being can duplicate is not at all a work of art. Since “no rational deliberation forms the basis of their labour” (Ibid, §43, 163/303 AE).
What is the basis of saying that the rules which govern the creation of a work of art are given to the genius. “Who is the creator by nature and are not the products of the genius itself?” Kant answer to this question is that an artist who follows those rules can not formulate them and hence can not teach them. The ineffability evidences the fact that those rules do not involve determinate concepts unlike the rules which govern the products of, say, carpentry. Also, nature might possess beautiful object but it can not produce works of art which are produced only by genius to which nature might prescribe rules. Such rules govern the genius in the expression of what Kant calls ‘aesthetic ideas’, apart from the skill to express them. “By an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. concept, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible” (Ibid, §49, 175-176/314 AE). Here, Kant contrasts an aesthetic idea with a rational idea which is a determinate concept and “to which no intuition … can be adequate” (Ibid, §49, 176/314 AE). The imagination whose representation is an aesthetic idea is productive in the sense it creates, “as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature” (Ibid ). The expression ‘as it were’ should not lead us to think that the work of fine arts is a non-cognitive work, that is, a work of make –belief. Any such interpretation is set at naught by the fact that he characterizes the imagination he associates with genius “as a productive faculty of cognition” (cf, Ibid. emphasis added). The cognitive significance such a work is difference from that of the work of common sense and science. Our thought about the latter are determinate as the concepts involve in them are determinate. In saying this Kant is making a very important point regarding what makes a work of art valuable. As Ghosh points out, “Not only is it important for art to be beautiful, it should
also be able to induce or communicate much thought in the mind of the viewer of art … This is how an ‘exemplary’ work inspires other kindred artists to create more works of art” (2004, 242). Further, the indeterminateness of the thoughts prompted by aesthetic ideas to which the genius gives a phenomenal form explains why no language can express them completely.

The above discussion shows why, according to Kant, aesthetic ideas constitute the core of a work of fine art and why he relates genius to the ‘animating principle’ of creative imagination without which a work of art will be soulless. Even admitting that natural beauty can expresses aesthetic ideas sans genius. But it must be noted that Kant’s idea of genius is not romantic, though romantic movement in art valorized the notion of genius. The success of genius in presenting aesthetic ideas requires something more than mere creative imagination. In particular it needs cultivation of taste. Kant emphatically says that “Genius can do no more than furnish rich material for products of fine art; its elaboration and its form require a talent academically trained, so that it may be employed in such a way as to stand the test of judgement” (1952, §47, 171-172/310 AE). In other words, genius needs to be cultivated so as not to conflict with the judgement of taste. Mere “imagination … entitles an art to be called an inspired (geistreiche) than a fine art. It is only in respect of judgement [of taste] that the name of fine art is deserved” (Ibid, §50, 182/319 AE). Taste must limit imagination since untrammelled or uncontrolled imagination is self defeating. The importance Kant attaches to the cultivation of taste vis-à-vis creative imagination which has it locus in genius has led some scholars to think that according to Kant though genius is necessary for the production of art objects taste without genius is sufficient for the purpose. But what is said above indicates that in Kant’s view genius in necessary but not sufficient and genius and taste together constitute
a sufficient condition. Perhaps, Allison is right in attributing to Kant two conceptions of genius—a thick one and a thin one. The thick conception of genius includes taste whereas the thin one is limited to a mere imaginative capacity. According to Allison, the function of the latter is “largely polemical” in so far as it is used to emphasis the “dangerous flight of fancy”. It is the former which does justice to his account of fine art and his “creation aesthetics” (cf. 2001, 301).

**IV.3 Kant on the Value of Art**

We now came to the views of Kant regarding the value of art. This discussion is important because it is generally maintained because Kant defines beauty (whether in nature or in art) in terms of purposiveness without purpose, Kant is autonomist regarding the status of art. The concept of autonomy of art implies that art has no value outside itself. The value it has is only its intrinsic value. The autonomist interpretation of Kant made him one of the key figures of ‘Art for Art’s sake’ movement. Of course, there are Kantian scholars who questioned this interpretation. According to them, in Kant’s view the value of art consists not only in its intrinsic significance but also in its facilitating broader human goals such as edification or widening of our intellectual horizons, etc.,.

The autonomist interpretation of Kant’s stand on the value of art lays high premium on what it is considered to be the formalist view of art. On the other hand, the non-autonomist interpretation of Kant emphasizes his expressivist view of art, according to which the essence of art consists in its ability to express aesthetic ideas. Hence, any answer to the question whether Kant is an autonomist or not depends of on our answer to
the question whether Kant is a formalist or is an expressivist. Therefore, we first take up the latter question.

Murray’s assertion that “Kant was a strict formalist with regard to beauty in nature and in art” (2007, 206) is a typically characterization of Kant’s view of art. Crawford declares that “in the parts of the *Critique of judgement* in which form is emphasized as the essential aspect of beauty, Kant is consistently a pure formalist, in the sense that every non-formal feature of an object is completely irrelevant to its beauty and is usually … also a positive distraction and interferes with the aesthetic experience of beauty” (1974, 100). The plausibility of such a characterization of Kant is understandable for the following reasons. First of all, the scholars who provided such a characterization find it an easy way of demarcating Kant’s position from the traditional view fathered by Aristotle who identified art with *mimesis*, on the one hand, and, the subjectivist view of art propounded by Hume and others according to whom beauty is identical with agreeableness. Secondly, the formalist interpretations get its force from Kant himself. For instance, Kant is forthright in saying “in all fine art the essential element consists in the form which is final for observation and for estimating” (1952, §52, 190/326 AE). After all, Kant’s stated aim of deduction of judgements of taste is to demonstrate how “one who feels pleasure in simple reflection on the form of an object, without having any concept in mind, rightly lays claim to the agreement of every one” (*Ibid*, Introduction, VII, 32/191 AE). Finally, Kant’s theory of knowledge is rightly taken to be structuralist and structuralism in epistemology and formalism in aesthetics go hand in hand.

But two questions arise in connection with this plausible interpretation of Kant as a formalist. They are: (1) “Does Kant mean that only form is constitutive of beauty?” and
(2) “Whether or not this is does, is the value of art consists only in beauty?” We take up the first question. Suppose beauty of a work of art consist exclusively in its form (of purposiveness). Suppose further we have an extraordinarily beautiful work of painting. Suppose also that we have another painting which is a perfect copy of the former. If both of them are said to be equally beautiful, that is, the latter is in no way aesthetically inferior to the former, we will be forced to say that genius involved in the first work of art is not constitutive of the artistic beauty. But such a conclusion goes against Kant’s declarations that “fine arts must necessarily be regarded as arts of genius” (Ibid, §46, 168/307 AE), and Kant does not include even perfect copying as a constitutive element of genius. After all, even a perfect copy is a mechanical production involving known rules. Hence, even while accepting that form is a basic constituent of beauty we have to qualify this statement in order to make room for the role of genius in the creation of artistic beauty.

We now came to answer question (2) which is about whether the value of a work of art consists in something more than its beauty which is the function of both the form of purposiveness and the role of genius, the latter involving both creative imagination and highly cultivated taste. Of course, Kant’s answer is very clear. According to him, a work of fine art must express aesthetic ideas which give rise to thoughts albeit indeterminate. Those works of art which express aesthetic ideas are considered by him to be possessing ‘spirit’ (geist) and hence are better works of art than those which do not. Also, it is the expressiveness of aesthetic ideas which distinguishes, according to Kant, fine art from merely agreeable art. In the case of agreeable art the pleasure is accompanied by mere sensations whereas the pleasure produced by a work of fine art is accompanied by what Kant calls ‘modes of cognition’ (cf. Ibid, §44, 165/305 AE) Kant associates a work of
fine art with modes of cognition because by expressing aesthetic ideas a work of art ignites indeterminate thoughts. However, Kant is not clear about the relation between beauty of a work of art and its ability to express aesthetic ideas. Of course, he is clear that it is not a necessary condition. This is because, first of all, expression of aesthetic ideas is not unique to works of fine art since even objects of natural beauty do so. Secondly, mere expression of aesthetic ideas is not sufficient for something to be beautiful. In fact, aesthetic expressiveness and aesthetic worth of an object are not directly proportional to each other. In spite of all this, the expression of aesthetic ideas is organically linked to the aesthetic value called ‘beauty’, though the expressiveness of aesthetic ideas itself may not be constitutive of the aesthetic value. This is clearly brought out in the following passage dealing with the employment of a universal language of sensations which can be understood by every human being: “the art of tone [music] yields the full force of this language wholly on its own account, namely, as a language of the affections … But, further, inasmuch as those aesthetic ideas are not concepts or determinate thoughts, the form of the arrangement of these sensations (harmony and melody), taking the place of the form of a language, only serves the purpose of giving an expression to the aesthetic idea of an integral whole of an unutterable wealth of thought that fills the measure of a certain theme forming the dominant affection in the piece (Ibid, §53, 194/329 AE). This passage is significant as it brings out a complete correlation between form and expression. As Allison says for Kant such a relation is even more intimate in other art forms (cf, 2001. 289).

The question is “How are beauty and aesthetic expressiveness related?” Whatever may be the intimacy between them the latter is not constitutive of the former. Hence, the value of a work of art consists in its being more than embodying beauty. This means if
for Plato beauty is too important to be left to art, for Kant the value of art can not be
exhausted by beauty. This takes us to the question with which we started, namely, “Is
Kant a purist, that is, an autonomist?” Before we answer that question directly, let us
summarize our discussion of the question whether Kant is a pure formalist.

Having a design, that is, a purposive form is necessary but not sufficient for a work
of fine art to be beautiful. It is only by being accompanied with genius that it can render a
work to be beautiful. Hence, it is not a sufficient condition for the beauty of a work of art.
To the extent Kant considers the purposive form to be a necessary condition of the beauty
of an object of fine art, Kant is a formalist. But, his formalism becomes highly qualified
when he considers purposive form to be insufficient for the beauty of a work of fine art.
His position on the nature of art becomes more than formalist when he asserts that a work
of fine art, unlike a work of agreeable art, must be capable of expressing aesthetic ideas.
Thus, expressivism becomes a component of his position that complements the formalist
component. Two points are to be noted here. The expressivist component of his position
Kant perhaps owes to Herder, a contemporary of Kant, who was the father of the
Expressivist movement. Of course, Kant was not an expressivist unlike Herder. After all,
Herder rejected modernity in toto, whereas Kant sought only to modify the tents of
modernity and even to reject them. Secondly, the formalist dimension of Kant’s position
on the nature of art which concerns the beautiful in a work of art is very intimately
related to the expressivist dimension of his position. We should bear in mind the fact that,
according to Kant, the expressiveness of a work of fine art concerns aesthetic ideas.
Thus, the formalist and expressivist dimension of his position are welded together.
The above discussion regarding the characterization of Kant’s position on art paves the way for judging whether he is an autonomist/purist as is usually thought. Though ‘autonomy’ has been used in the literature of aesthetics in many ways, the term signifies the idea that the value of a work of art is devoid of any practical import, that is, the value of art has only to do with its aesthetic worth, viz., beauty and has nothing to do with its instrumental value. The instrumental value need not be crude like monitory gain or social status or even means of political or religious propaganda. It may concern more exalted purposes. Such a view may be called, following Casey Haskins, strict autonomism. As opposed this view, we may have strict instrumentalism according to which the value of art has much less to do with its aesthetic worth than its extra-artistic significance. Such a view finds its expressions, for instance, in the following word of Tolstoy “Art like speech is a means of communication and therefore of progress, that is, of the movement of humanity forward towards perfection …[A]rt renders accessible to men of the latest generations all the feelings experienced by their predecessors and also those felt by their best and foremost contemporaries” (quoted in Haskins 1989, 47). If the strict autonomist looks upon any consideration other than aesthetic worth to be extraneous to and even antithetical to art and its value, the strict instrumentalist considers the concern with beauty in a work of art to be mere indulgence which undermines the value of an art work. Following Casey Haskins we may characterize Kant’s position as being neither strict autonomist nor strict instrumentalist but ‘instrumental autonomist’ (cf, 1989, 43). This is because Kant’s views on the issue we are discussing take into account with equal measure both aesthetic and instrumental components of art. The aesthetic components concerns all that Kant has identified, namely, disinterested and universally shareable pleasure, born out of contemplation on the form of purposiveness generated by the free
and harmonious play of imagination and understanding. In connection with the significance Kant attaches to the instrumental component of art, Haskins draws our attention to the following passage from the Kant “But should the feeling of pleasure be what it has immediately in view it is then termed aesthetic art. As such it may be either agreeable or fine art. The description ‘agreeable art’ applies where the end of the art is that the pleasure should accompany the representations considered as mere sensations, the description ‘fine art’ where it is to accompany them considered as modes of cognition … Fine art … is a mode of representation which is intrinsically final, and which, although devoid of an end, has the effect of advancing the culture of the mental powers in the interests of social communication” (1952, §44, 165,166/305,306 AE).

Before we come to the elaboration of ‘social communication’ that Kant associated with work of fine art vis-à-vis, agreeable art, let us note the significance Kant attaches to it. According to Kant fine art, and not agreeable art, possesses Würde (which Meredith translates as ‘intrinsic worth’ and Haskins translates as ‘dignity’) precisely because a work of fine art expresses aesthetic ideas that generate indeterminate thoughts whose communication itself can be a source of additional pleasure. Hence, the value of a work of art is directly related to the social communication that it generates or at least facilitates. Kant, of course, does not provide an empirical description of such a social communication. This is because his aesthetic undertaking is not an empirical inquiry but a transcendental one in the sense it inquires into the a priori conditions of the very possibility of aesthetic experience and consequently aesthetic judgement. However, he identifies the desirable phenomena that the social function of fine art brings about. In giving the theoretical elements of such a sociology of art Kant points out the following: firstly, the social communication made possible by art enables the members of a
community to exhibit what he calls ‘common sense’ (senses communes) by which is Kant understands “the idea of a public sense, i.e. a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind, and thereby avoid the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions which could readily be taken for objective” (Ibid, §40, 151/293 AE). In other words, such a social communication enables us to overcome personal prejudices and facilitates critical thinking. Secondly, such communication to an extent reduces social fragmentation by bringing together different sections of society into a common reciprocity. The result is a sense of solidarity, produced by a feeling of belonging to a common ethos. Thirdly, such a communication heightens our sense of what it is to be moral; as the aesthetic ideas which constitute the fulcrum of such a communication symbolizes moral ideas. In this sense Kant might agree with Ruskin who says that “taste is highest morality”. Finally, since such a communication concerns indeterminate thoughts it has a cognitive or at least proto-cognitive significance even though such communication is non discursive. The aesthetic idea which is figure in such a communication enlarges our discourse. Such ideas include “invisible beings”, “the kingdom of the blessed”, “hell”, “eternity”, “creation”, “death” such a communication makes us sensitive to “not merely the supersensible but also the relation between the supersensible and sensible aspects of experience” (Haskins 1989, 48). Haskins very aptly says “It provides quasi-cognitive insights into aspects of human existence which are beyond the means of ordinary discursive thought” (Ibid, 51).

It is true that Kant has exaggerated the cultural significance of fine arts. But what is important is the way he relates the value of what art is with the value of what art does. They are aesthetically welded because the ideas which figure in social communication
pertaining to fine arts are aesthetic ideas. Thus, Kant’s position is that fine art has an autonomy undoubtedly and hence it is valuable for its own sake. But, art acquires a value beyond itself. However, since the latter concerns the social communications of ideas which are aesthetic it is not trans-artistic totally. This is how Kant overcomes the dichotomy between strict autonomism and strict instrumentalism. Thus, against the conventional understanding, Kant is not a purist in aesthetics, though, he may be purist in ethics. He may maintain duty for the sake of duty but not beauty for the sake of beauty. However, this did not take him to the other extreme of down playing the autonomy of art and intrinsic value of artistic beauty.

We end this chapter by making a critical comment on a crucial point in Kant’s theory of art. This concerns the water-tight distinction he makes between science and art. No doubt, Kant is right in making that distinction but the way he makes it smacks of a view of science which is virtually discarded, thanks to the post-positivist developments in philosophy of science. First of all, Kant’s idea that in science, unlike in art, we proceed with rules which constitute the cannons of scientific method stand discredited today. On the one hand, Thomas Kuhn has shown that such cannons or rules underdetermine our choice of theories in the sense more than one theory simultaneously satisfies those cannons so, that our choice of a theory of judgement depends more than the rules. Paul Feyerabend, on the other hand, has gone further by showing that history of science is full of instances were new theories are chosen by violating any imaginable rule and creative breakthroughs where possible only by such violations. This shows that Kant’s idea of genius which he associates exclusively with art exclusively can be applicable to science also. Further, Kant’s idea that scientific theories are real/literal descriptions of the phenomenal world whereas artistic creations are not, has been called into question today.
The incommensurability thesis of Kuhn and Feyerabend has shown that the relation between our theories and reality is not one of one–to-one correspondence. Today, it is accepted that reality is at least partly constructed by our theories which described them. Ironically, the supports of the view that in science reality is determined by the language which science uses at a specific time—the view generally called Internal Realism—find a parallel and even motivation in the thoughts of Kant himself. Many philosophers of science, hence, today argue convincingly that our scientific theories are related to the world in the way metaphors are related to what they describe. As in the case of metaphors, the value of a scientific theory consists in, not correspondence, but aptness. Further, a theory is rejected not so much because it is proved to be experimentally false, but because it fails to suggest new directions of research. Hence, as in the case of a work of art, so in the case of a scientific theory it is suggestiveness that is crucial. Hence, the line between science and art which Kant has drawn is rendered very thin. Of course, Kant’s idea of science is central to the ideology of Enlightenment of which he was a great champion. In spite of his major reservations about some aspects of that ideology, his idea of science is not a departure from the image of science which that ideology built. Hegel’s words “you can not be better than your age though you can be your age at its best” holds in the case of Kant at least so far as his idea of science-art distinction is concerned. But this in no way diminishes the significance of his philosophy of art.