CHAPTER-III

KANT'S THEORY OF BEAUTY

III.1 Some Preliminaries

This chapter, in an important sense, is continuous with the previous one for more than the simple reason that beauty and the judgements about it are two sides of the same coin. This reason apart, the continuity can be seen in relation to the fact that our claims regarding the logical and cognitive status of the pure judgements of taste in the last chapter get reinforced by our discussion in this chapter in the sense those claims are made both palpable and plausible.

However, apart from reinforcing what is said in the last chapter this chapter has independent themes concerning, most importantly, the nature of aesthetic experience. As all students of Kant know, one of the central questions which Critical Philosophy sought to answer was “How is experience (as something more than a mere hailstorm of sensations) possible?” By this question Kant meant “What are the a priori conditions of the possibility of experience?” Students of Kant also know that by classifying experience into objective/cognitive, moral and aesthetic, Kant decomposed this question into: (1) What are the a priori conditions of the possibility of objective/cognitive experience? (2) What are the a priori conditions of the possibility of moral experience? and; (3) What are the a priori conditions of the possibility of aesthetic experience? The first two questions
are answered in the first two *Critiques* respectively. The most significant aspect of the first part of the third *Critique* lies in Kant's attempt to answer the third question and the answer is related to, but distinction from, his views on the nature of pure aesthetic judgements.

It must be noted that Kant confines his reflections mainly on beauty to natural beauty. The experience of beauty in art is not central to his concern with aesthetic experience. The paradigmatic status of the natural beauty, no doubt, makes beauty in art somewhat secondary to his concern. This position of Kant is reinforced by his demand that a work of art must resemble an object of nature. But, this does not prevent him from having a deep philosophical engagement with art, as we shall see in chapter IV.

Be it as it may, there remains the question regarding the primacy which Kant accords to natural beauty vis-à-vis artistic beauty. One answer can be the following: the *Critique of Pure Reason* provides the philosophical contours of a mechanistic theory of nature which has no place for freedom. In the second *Critique* Kant has shown that since moral action is not an illusion, we must assume that we have *freedom* to choose between desire and duty. As Körner says “Together they show that the theoretically necessary principles, which apply to *phenomena*, and the practically necessary principles, which refer to *noumena*, are logically compatible” (1955, 177). However, since our freedom finds realization in nature through our actions, natural necessity and moral freedom are not just logically compatible but they must be grounded in reality in the sense that it must be possible for us to make a transition from the way of thinking in terms of the laws of nature to the one related to freedom. An important dimension of the third *Critique* is to
identify such a ground by establishing the required harmony between nature and freedom. Obviously it is natural beauty, and not the artistic one, which foots the bill.

The primacy which Kant gives to beauty in nature vis-à-vis beauty in art should also be understood in relation to his view that beauty is a symbol of morality and since here Kant means by 'beauty' primarily 'natural beauty', natural beauty acquires paradigmatic status for the simple reason that the question of morality is central to Kant's thinking. A question might arise: “What sense can we make of Kant's claim that nature to be beautiful must look like a work of art?” As Rueger points out “Kant's statement does not mean that we should find art forms in nature; it means … that a natural form, in order to be beautiful, has to agree with a form we, in our imagination, could have produced freely” (2007, 153). Kant's position regarding the primacy of natural beauty was opposed by Hegel according to whom aesthetics has to be primarily a philosophy of (fine) art since an adequate aesthetic theory needed objective categories that could be found only in art history and not in natural history. We do not find any pre-Kantian aestheticians propounding the primacy of natural beauty over the artistic one. However, the 20th century philosophers like Heidegger and Adorno find a deep meaning in Kant's claim though for different reasons.

We may end this section by noting that it is Kant's analysis of beauty which brought him the label 'father of Formalist aesthetics'. One of the central aspects of Kant's analysis of the beautiful concerns the formal features of the object of beauty as distinct from the content such an object might have. This aspect of Kant's theory of beauty has had formative influence on the early champions of abstract art. However, another aspect of Kant's analysis of beauty concerns what he called ‘contemplative disinterestedness’
which distinguishes aesthetic appraisal from ethical or pragmatic evaluation. This is “the thesis which every proponent of an alternative account has left compelled to combat first since Kant articulated it two centuries ago” (Cooper 1997, 96).

**III.2 Kant on the Experience of the Beautiful**

The question is, “Given that the pure aesthetic experience is the experience of the beautiful, what is it to be beautiful or what is beauty?” Kant's answer to this question is the best entry point into his analysis of pure aesthetic experience i.e. the experience of beauty. Kant works out his theory of beauty in close relation with his analysis of pure aesthetic judgements. According to him, aesthetic judgements have, analogous to objective empirical judgements, what are called Quantity, Quality, Relation and Modality, each of which yields a partial definition of beauty and a complete definition that contains all the four partial definitions constitutes the *synthetic a priori* principle underlying aesthetic experience. This very attempt of Kant to work out a theory of beauty in relation to the logical kinds of pure aesthetic judgements should have dispelled any doubt about the cognitive content of pure aesthetic experience and consequently of pure judgements of taste. It is surprising that many scholars not only question such a cognitive content but even deny it in the name of Kant.

Be it as it may, Kant's first partial definition of beauty concerns what he calls 'Quality' of pure judgements of taste. According to this partial definition the pleasure connected with the experience of a beautiful object is without any interest whatsoever. The object of a delight which is disconnected from any interest whatever is called 'beautiful'. By 'interest' Kant means the pleasure associated with the existence of an
object. This means that in pure aesthetic experience we are concerned with, not an object but with the mere presentation of an object. This partial definition is logically linked to Kant's basic contention that pure judgements of taste involve neither an *a posteriori* concept (even though aesthetic experience is an experience of a manifold of presentations) and nor the application of categories.

The second partial definition which concerns 'Quantity' states that “the beautiful is that which, apart from concepts, is represented as the Object of Universal delight” (Kant 1952, §6, 50/211 AE). This partial definition is important because it distinguishes pure aesthetic experience i.e. experience of the beautiful, from the subjective experience. It must be noted here that the experience of the beautiful invokes a normative dimension in so far as the demand that others necessarily have a feeling of pleasantness is woven into the very fabric of pure aesthetic experience. This enables Kant to argue for a common human sense which we may call 'aesthetic sense' which is built into our very nature as human beings. As we all know, the idea of a universal human nature is the crux of modernist ethos which was shared by Kant and to which he gives a new content in terms of not only a categorical framework as in the first *Critique*, a locus for the moral law as in the second *Critique*, and, equally importantly, the aesthetic sense, in the third *Critique*, as we have just seen. Equally significantly, Kant has rejected by means of this partial definition not only aesthetic subjectivism but also aesthetic relativism which maintains that aesthetic evaluations are culture-specific.

The third partial definition which concerns 'Relation' states that “Beauty is the form of finality in an object, so far as perceived in it *apart from the representation of an end*” (*Ibid*, §17, 80/236 AE). By this Kant means that beauty concerns form of purposiveness
in an object apart from the presentation of a purpose. Here, by purposiveness Kant means a design that exhibits a harmonious relation between parts and between parts and the whole as distinct from the purpose it may serve. By 'finality' Kant means 'purposiveness' or 'being a purposive whole'. As he says, “A flower … such as a tulip, is regarded as beautiful, because we meet with a certain finality in its perception, which, in our estimate of it, is not refereed to any end whatever” (Ibid). Thus, beauty in nature concerns the form (of purposiveness) of an object and beauty in art concerns the human representation of that form. This means, that whereas the content is privately given, form concerns public features of aesthetic experience. In this sense the experience of beauty is public and, therefore, trans-subjective. The third partial definition brings out the formalist thrust of Kantian aesthetics apart from his rejection of any relation between an object of aesthetic experience and the purpose it may serve, social or spiritual.

The last partial definition provided under the rubric 'Modality' states that “The beautiful is that which, apart from a concept, is cognized as object of a necessary delight (Ibid, §22, 85/240 AE). This definition reiterates what is already said by the second partial definition viz. a thing of beauty is an object of universal delight. The fourth partial definition characterizes the universality of that delight as necessary one and not contingent- as assertion that emphasizes Kant’s contention that there is in human nature something called 'aesthetic sense' in which the necessary relation between pleasantness and the perception of purposiveness is grounded.

The four partial definitions of beauty Kant calls four 'moments'. Three of the crucial concepts in the complete definition of beauty are: (1) 'Universal and necessary pleasure';
(2) Disinterestedness; and (3) Form of finality/purposiveness. Some discussion about them is needed to complete the picture of beauty that Kant has drawn.

(1) The significance of the concept of necessary and universal pleasure/delight lies in the fact that the aesthetic pleasure involves a free interplay between imagination and understanding. Aesthetic pleasure is made possible by the freedom with which imagination plays with understanding even though it is constrained by the understanding\(^1\). In other words, while pleasure is the heart of experience of beauty, that pleasure is the result of the free play of imagination and understanding. Thus, in the experience of beauty pleasure is the result of that free play of imagination and understanding which Kant calls the harmonious relation between two faculties of imagination and understanding. As Kemal points out “the particular grasp of the object … of beauty … occasions a feeling of pleasure resulting from a 'harmony of faculties' (as contrasted with a determinate relation between faculties)” (1998, 32). Two facts that led Kant to think that the pleasure associated with the beautiful is due to the harmony of the two faculties in free play are: a) it can only be based on a state related to cognition; b) it is a feeling and hence cannot actually be a cognition and its universality cannot be derived from the universality of a determinate concept as no such concept is involved.

\(^1\) As is well known, Kant makes room for imagination in his analysis of empirical experience in his first Critique. According to his analysis of empirical experience, the first stage is the occurrence of a manifold of presentations constituted by perceived, remembered and imagined data. The second stage is the suitable collection or synthesis of the manifold by imagination. In Kant’s own words "synthesis, generally speaking, is ... the mere operation of the imagination –a blind but indispensable function of the soul, [or mind] without which we should have no cognition whatever, but of the working of which we are seldom even conscious" (1934, p.78). (This will be followed by the third and the fourth stages in which understanding which applies a posteriori concepts and categories respectively; the application of the latter results in synthetic unity and consequently objective reference of the manifold of presentations). The word ‘blind’ used in connection with the function of imagination shows that the role of imagination in empirical experience is mechanical or quasi-mechanical whereas in aesthetic experience it is not so and this is what makes aesthetic experience unlike its empirical counterpart.
either in the experience of or the judgement about the beautiful. As Kalar says “What the combination of these two facts requires is a mental state that is akin to cognition, without actually being cognition. Free play, as Kant describes it, fits the bill” (2006, 39). Of course, not all pleasures are due to such a harmonious relation between imagination and understanding. But, according to Kant, aesthetic pleasure definitely is. This distinctive mark of aesthetic pleasure is linked to its distinctive character, namely, its necessary universality. Kantian scholars like Kemal invoke the concept of harmonious relation to account for the communicability of aesthetic experience which logically follows from its necessary universality. Kemal draws our attention to Kant's uneasiness produced by the fact “that subjects' internal reflection is corrigible because it can confuse disinterested pleasure with pleasure in charm, emotion, sensation, moral connotations, or successful communication” (1998, 32). In other words, two aesthetic subjects might experience the same pleasure but for different reasons, one for wrong reason and another for right one. That is, Kant feels the need to propose that the subject “must seek confirmation for the putatively universally valid subjective judgement through agreement from other subjects when they, too, make the same pleasurable judgement” (Ibid, 33). This shows that aesthetic experience needs confirmation and hence could be false. Kant, thus, insists on the cruciality of communication. According to him, as Kemal says, “We gain confirmation when subjects successfully communicate their feeling of pleasure or displeasure, enabling another subject to make the same judgement and, based on that communication, to agree about the beauty of the object” (Ibid). The above discussion can be summarized in the words of Kalar, “The notion of free play is thus evidently intended to provide a link between cognition, on the one side, and aesthetic pleasure, on the other.
This is the link that will supply the basis for the universal validity of pleasure in the beautiful’ (Ibid, 39).

The above discussion of the concept of pleasure has shown how pleasure in the Kantian's scheme has a cognitive dimension via its relation, in particular, to the free and harmonious interplay between imagination and understanding. It is necessary to recapitulate the point that imagination and understanding involved in the production of aesthetic experience account for two apparently contradictory aspects of aesthetic pleasure. The role of imagination explains the freedom involved in aesthetic pleasure whereas the role of understanding consists in putting constraints on imagination and hence, limit freedom and thus can explain the necessity or unfreedom in aesthetic pleasure. It is obvious that central to Kant's analysis of aesthetic pleasure is the recognition of the dual aspect of aesthetic pleasure namely, freedom-cum-necessity. It is in this way Kant shows how necessity which characterizes the domain of nature and freedom which characterizes the domain of morality are co-present in the domain of the aesthetic which, therefore, is grounded in the intimate relation between necessity and freedom-a relation which is more than merely one of logical compatibility. Thus, the third Critique provides a thematic unity to the whole of Critical Philosophy.

We end this discussion of pleasure in the Kantian scheme by noting two more points about it. These points are made by Kant himself either directly or indirectly:

a) It is a truism to say that pleasure is a feeling. The question is “What is its hallmark?” According to Kant, pleasure as a feeling is a very special faculty of discrimination and, hence, involves appraisal. In this connection Allison mentions Kant's idea of appraisal as an act of reflection which “compares the given representation in the
subject with the entire representational faculty of which the mind becomes conscious when it feels its own state” (cf. 2001, 69). In other words, aesthetic pleasure is not an ordinary pleasure wherein we simply receive pleasant sensations. Kant relates this unique feature of aesthetic pleasure to its central element which he characterizes as contemplation of the beautiful which 'reinforces' and 'reproduces' itself. According to Allison, this enables Kant to explain the fact that pure aesthetic experience and a pure judgement of taste expressing it are two sides of the same coin such that, as Kant repeatedly emphasizes, feeling functions as a predicate in a judgement of taste. As Allison aptly puts it “If feeling is itself regarded as a faculty of discrimination and appraisal … it then becomes natural to link it with judgement” (Ibid, 70). In short, the intimate relation between the feeling of pleasure and pure aesthetic judgements is due to the fact that the feeling itself is in some sense judgemental. Hence, the relation between a feeling of aesthetic pleasure and the corresponding pure judgement of taste is not like the relation between a fact and its corresponding proposition. This is one important way of distinguishing between what a pure judgement of taste is about and what an objective empirical judgement is about.

b) The next question about pleasure as feeling is “What kind of feeling pleasure is?” Allison draws our attention to Kant's characterization of pleasure as “feeling of life” (cf. Allison 2001, 69) in his writings subsequent to the third Critique. By this expression Kant means that pleasure is a feeling of the promotion of life and displeasure as the feeling of hindrance to life. Allison in this connection makes reference to Kant's characterization of the concept of pleasure as “the idea of the agreement of an object or an action with the subjective conditions of life” (Ibid). Allison rightly points out “Kant understands by pleasure and displeasure something like a sense of the increase or
diminution of one's level of activity, particularly one's activity as a thinking being” (*Ibid*).

We can compare Kant's idea of hindrance to life and promotion of life as well as his ideas of disagreement with the subjective conditions of life and agreement with the subjective conditions of life mentioned by Allison above, with Marx's concepts of alienation and the overcoming of alienation. Marxist aestheticians seek to show how art and literature help us in overcoming alienation at least for the time being (though complete and permanent overcoming is possible only after the collapse of the class society). Engels expresses this idea when he says that art and literature make us 'feels at home' in a hostile world. Of course, we must keep in mind the fact that promotion of life effected by aesthetic experience is not the purpose of our aesthetic endeavor since according to Kant aesthetic pleasure is disinterested—a point we discuss below.

2) The concept of Disinterestedness is so crucial to Kant's conception of the beautiful or rather experience of the beautiful that, as we have seen, it figures in the very first moment or partial definition of the beautiful. That the pure aesthetic experience is devoid of any interest and hence essentially involves contemplation was not a majority view in Kant's time and hence in an important sense it is a claim which is a original contribution of Kant. We can at least say that he was the first to bring it to the forefront of aesthetic discourse. Yet it is one of the problematic contentions of Kant. As we have seen, according to Kant, to say that pure aesthetic experience is free from any interest is to say that pure aesthetic pleasure is indifferent to the existence of objects described as beautiful. Now the problem is this: How can someone who takes pleasure in beauty be indifferent to the existence of the very object which is the source of the pleasure. Allison's straightforward answer is that “appearances to the contrary, the disinterestedness thesis does not really require that one be” (*Ibid*, 94). Hence, Kant's
disinterestedness thesis pertains to “the quality of the liking (or disliking) by means of which an object is deemed beautiful (or non-beautiful)” (Ibid, 94-95). That is to say, if aesthetic value is determined by interest it loses its autonomy and hence purity since it becomes a means of realizing some other value. Genuine aesthetic appreciation thus involves autonomy and is opposed to heteronomy in the same way in which genuine moral experience involves autonomy and is antithetical to heteronomy. Just as an action’s moral worth is determined by whether it is based on a will which freely submits itself to the moral law, the genuineness of an aesthetic experience is determined by whether it is based on a disinterested liking.

What does Kant mean by interest? He means “The pleasure we feel in the existence of an object because it satisfies a desire or some moral purpose. When we have an interest, we assess how well objects can serve these purposes” (Kemal 1998, 31). The question is, “Why does Kant bring in the existence of an object or its representation in his conception of interest? After all, an object satisfies an interest because of its properties, and not by its existence. Kant's answer may be that an object must first exist to possess a property which is why existence is not one of its properties. This is what Kant means when he says that ‘existence’ is not a predicate in his attack on the ontological argument for the existence of God in the Transcendental Dialectic in Critique of Pure Reason.

However, Kant's characterization of aesthetic experience in terms of disinterested pleasure goes beyond the contention that it should be based on a liking free from all interests. According to Kant, disinterestedness consists, in addition, in not giving rise to any interest i.e. not being a ground for an interest. This claim of Kant looks contrary to facts because many people who enjoy a pleasure not based on any interest do tend to
develop interest in the existence of things. For example, they value objects which give such a pleasure and admire museums which house them. Before we can answer this objection against Kant it is necessary to note what Kant means when he says that pure aesthetic experience is not only based on interest but also it should not give rise to any interest. Kant wants to elucidate the notion of disinterestedness by juxtaposing pure experience of beauty on the one hand and experience of the agreeable and moral experience, on the other. The presence of interest in the case of the experience of the agreeable is obvious. After all such an experience involves pleasant sensations easily traceable to an object. The contrast with moral experience is very interesting especially in view of the fact that there is a parallel between moral experience and aesthetic experience which we have noted. To repeat the point already made, both moral and aesthetic experiences are alike in not being based on interest. Yet, they are different because whereas moral experience can and does give rise to an interest whereas aesthetic experience does not. As Allison points out “it is only because the law generates an interest that pure reason can be practical. But this entails that its capacity to give rise to an interest is at least partly constitutive of our 'liking' for it, which Kant terms 'respect’” (2001, 96). The interest that is given rise to is the promotion of the moral good which is for Kant only goodwill. According to Allison the existence of such a thing is constitutive of moral experience. Allison rightly concedes that aesthetic experience also may give rise to an interest in the sense of a liking for existence of something but that interest is only incidental to and not constitutive of aesthetic experience. Thus, to say that aesthetic pleasure is disinterested is to say that an interest (in the existence of things liked) is not a “part of the determining ground of the liking itself” (Ibid).
Though Allison's contention that the interest (in the existence of things) to which
pure aesthetic pleasure gives rise is not constitutive of that pleasure is acceptable, it is
strange that he characterizes the relation between such an interest and such a pleasure as
merely *incidental*. First of all, the term 'incidental' has a negative ring about it in the
sense of denying an organic relation between the two. Secondly, and more importantly, in
Kant's own lexicon 'constitutive' is juxtaposed to 'regulative'. Can we not say that the idea
of such an interest is an idea *regulating* our thinking about aesthetic matters, just as
theoretical ideas regulate our thinking about matters of fact and practical ideas regulate
our thinking about matters of contact, as Kant labored hard in his first two *Critiques*
respectively? Of course, the way in which the regulation of our thinking about matters
aesthetic may be radically different from the regulation by the theoretical and practical
ideas. It is a task for Kantian scholarship to elucidate the notion of aesthetic regulation by
the idea of an interest (in the existence of things) produced by aesthetic pleasure of which
that interest is definitely not constitutive.

We may end our discussion of the concept of disinterestedness by looking at some
important observations made by Paul Guyer. According to Guyer, Kant's contention that
pure aesthetic experience, that is, experience of beauty, should not be based on any
interest is well taken as it perfectly squares with our common intuitions. But he contends
that Kant's claim that pure aesthetic experience should not be a ground for an interest (i.e.
pure aesthetic experience should not only be not caused by an interest but also should not
result in an interest) is not convincingly established by him in the third *Critique* for the
reason his definition of 'interest' in terms of the pleasure caused by the existence of an
object is inadequate in substantiating his claim. According to Guyer, we must go to the
*Critique of Practical Reason* for a definition of 'interest' for the purpose of substantiating
Kant's claim. Guyer brings to our notice Kant's definition of interest in the second *Critique*, namely, “An incentive of the will so far as it is presented by reason” (quoted in Guyer 1992, 244). Further, Guyer refers to Kant's definition of determining ground of the will in terms of “The conception of an object and its relation to the subject, whereby the faculty of desire is determined to seek its realization” (quoted in Ibid). Treating the definiendum as equivalent to 'interest' Guyer says that “An interest is not itself a feeling of pleasure, but rather a kind of concept of an object. A feeling of pleasure is, in a way, a possible incentive for the will, but for a will determined by reason, the feeling of pleasure must be linked to a concept to serve as an incentive” (Ibid). In other words, according to Guyer, Kant's contention that pure aesthetic experience should not give rise to an interest should be understood in the light of the conceptual point that, “A desire for the existence of an object is an interest only when that object can be represented as an object of desire under some concept” (Ibid).

Guyer’s re-articulation of Kant's position on disinterestedness of pure aesthetic experience is both adequate and fits well with Kant's claim that aesthetic experience is free from the application of determinate concepts. However, it does not take into account the fact that in aesthetic experience we do not prevent an interest entering into the aesthetic situation but allow it to enter to be warded off. When I see a beautiful rose I definitely feel like possessing it. In fact, I cannot experience its beauty without desiring to possess it. But I ward off that desire to do justice to my aesthetic experience in order to preserve it and perpetuate that experience. Hence, detachment in aesthetic experience is in this sense de-attachment. In other words, aesthetic experience involves a will to overcome an interest rather than not allowing it to enter. After all, we are not wary of the possibility of interest entering into us. Rather, we are confident of clearing it away. The
situation reminds us of what Wittgenstein says about metaphysics, namely, we should not be afraid of metaphysics but rather we should withdraw when we are tempted to do metaphysics.

3) As we have seen, the experience of beauty, according to Kant, is the experience of a purposive whole, that is, a design. The design concerns “The structure of elements, their order, complexity, and unity, their coherence, meaning, and expression, the balance between the elements of the presentation, and the features that make up these items” (Kemal 1998, 32). More specifically, Kant speaks of purposiveness without purpose or form of purposiveness or form of finality. Kalar who seeks to provide a phenomenological interpretation of Kant's aesthetic theory rightly points out that in Kant's theory “The fundamental concept … is his notion of the 'mere form of purposiveness' or, alternatively, 'purposiveness without a purpose”’ (2006, 65). The significance of this concept which figures in the third partial definition of the Beautiful lies in the fact that it concerns the relation between the judging subject and the judged object, that is, the re/presentation of the object. As Allison says, the basic question underlying Kant's discussion here is, “How are we to characterize this relation, such that” it can account for the possibility of a universally communicable pleasure” (2001, 119). It is in this way the third partial or moment definition brings in the object, that is, its representation into the picture whereas the first two partial definitions which concern the concept of pleasure and the concept of the universal delight respectively concern only the subject. Kalar rightly considers the beautiful object as 'the objective pole' of Kant's theory of beauty (cf. 2006, 66).
As we have already noted, according to the third partial definition of beauty, beauty
is the form of purposiveness of the re/presentation of an object in so far as it is perceived
in the object without the representation of a purpose. The question that arises now is:
“What is purposiveness (without purpose) and what is the form of purposiveness?”

Kant starts by first elucidating the concept of a purpose. In doing so, he relates it
specifically to will. Will is defined as something that can be determined only by concepts
and is equated with acting in conformity with the representation of a purpose. This
means, to will is to set a purpose for oneself and hence a purpose is an object of volition.
Coming to the concept of purposiveness, he insists that it does not necessarily presuppose
the representation of a purpose though we may grasp the possibility of purposiveness
only in relation to a will, human or otherwise. So purposiveness without a purpose is a
distinct possibility. Kant's elucidation of the concept of purposiveness is substantially
negative. He speaks of two kinds of purpose, namely, subjective purpose and objective
purpose. By the former he means our interest in the agreeable and the latter he relates to
our interest in the (non-ethical) good. Pure aesthetic experience has nothing to do with
either of the two types of purpose which are exhaustive. Kant also makes a distinction
between subjective purposiveness and objective purposiveness. Since, according to Kant,
“Any determination of an objective purposiveness presupposes the concept of some
purpose that an object is to serve, it follows that there is no place in the Kantian scheme
for the notion of an objective purposiveness without purpose” (Allison 2001, 126). That
is to say, objective purposiveness is invariably associated with either a subjective purpose
or an objective purpose and hence it cannot be purposiveness without purpose. Therefore,
only subjective purposiveness can be purposiveness without a purpose. In fact, as Allison
says, “subjective purposiveness’ and ‘purposiveness without purpose’ are equivalent
expressions” (Ibid). Since, according to Kant, purpose is an object of will and since experience of beauty is the experience of purposiveness without purpose, it follows that the will has no rule to play in aesthetic experience. The question now is, “How is the form of purposiveness related to beauty and our experience of the beautiful?” Allison gives satisfactory answer to this question when he says that since “for Kant to regard something as purposive without assigning a definite purpose to it is basically to view it as if intended (by a will), it is not a significant stretch to equate being subjectively purposive with exhibiting the 'form of purposiveness', in the sense of seeming as if designed” (Ibid, 126-127).

Subjective purposiveness as purposiveness without purpose is characterized by Kant as 'Merely formal purposiveness'. The contrast between subjective/formal purposiveness and objective purposiveness lies in this: objective purposiveness is, as lucidly pointed by Kalar, “is a form of liking that stems from the recognition that an object is in conformity with a rational concept; it is, in the lingo of the Third Moment, the recognition that the object constitutes a purpose or end. Merely formal purposiveness, on the other hand, ‘is quite independent of the concept of the good’” (2006, 68). This contract highlights the fact that the experience of the beautiful does not involve the kind of pleasure which emanates from the recognition of the realization of an intended pleasure. This does not mean that formal purposiveness and purpose cannot go together. All that means is that even if it fulfills an actual purpose which may even be intended, one must be able to disconnect that purpose from one's contemplation of the object. Kalar brings out this point very ably when he says that subjective or formal purposiveness can be “thought of as a feature of the subject's approach to the object, rather than of the object itself. It describes the way in which the object seems to the subject, as if it were
designed for something, without the subject connecting that appearance with the thought of a definite purpose” (Ibid, 69). This means that purposiveness without purpose is a mental state. But the question arises “What connection does the object have with the formal purposiveness?” This question is all the more pressing because Kant himself includes objects as items under the rubric of purposiveness without purpose. We cannot say that the object causes such a mental state because according to Kant the relation between the mental state of purposiveness and the object is a priori. Allison seeks to solve this problem by relating the object to the mental state of purposiveness by saying that the object occasions the interplay between imagination and understanding which in turn accounts for the mental state of purposiveness.

In our opinion this answer is unsatisfactory because the difference between occasioning and causing is not deep enough to carry the burden of Allison's point. The problems remain so long as we overlook the fact that the object in the aesthetic context, according to Kant, is not the phenomenal object itself but its presentation/representation. Purposiveness can have locus both in the mental state and in the representation of the object. The main reason for completely or substantially confining formal purposiveness to a mental state is the fear that any alternative to such a position undermines the subjectivist interpretation of Kantian aesthetics theory which is taken to be the authentic interpretation. According to this dissertation, pure judgements of taste (as shown in the second chapter) and, therefore, pure aesthetic experience are in some sense objective and in doing so the thesis accepts the interpretation of Kant provided by Karl Ameriks (cf. 1983, 3-5) locating purposiveness with purpose in both mental state and representation of an object. We can avoid the idea of beauty as an empirical property of things (and also subjectivism) for the simple reason that representation of an object is not objective in the
empirical sense. In fact, the notion of objectivity has been broadened by making room for non-empirical objectivity of the experience of beauty. In the articulation of this position this dissertation has laid high premium on 'purposiveness (without purpose)' because the pleasure associated with aesthetic experience has such purposiveness integral to it. As Kant says “The consciousness of mere formal finality in the play of the cognitive faculties of the subject attending a representation whereby an object is given, is the pleasure itself” (1952, §12, 64/222 AE). This means, aesthetic pleasure is primarily an awareness of purposiveness. A mental state is not purposive because it is a state of pleasure but rather it is pleasurable because it is purposive (cf. Allison 2001, 130-131). However, the subjectivity of aesthetic experience so engendered is offset by the locus of purposiveness in the representation of an object which concerns its form and form is not subjective in the way mental states are.

### III.3 Free and Adherent Beauty

The above discussion of Kant's theory of the experience of the beautiful takes us to the important distinction between 'free beauty' and 'merely adherent beauty' or merely 'dependent beauty'. In fact, he characterizes them as pure and applied beauty. The word ‘merely’ used in the case of adherent/dependent beauty gives the impression that it is the lower kind of beauty and so does the term 'dependent'. In fact, Kant describes free beauty as 'self-subsisting' and adherent beauty as 'conditional' and this description sounds as if Kant considers the former as absolute and the latter as relative. Whether this impression is intended by him we will consider later. According to Kant, beauty is adherent if the beautiful object is associated with a specific purpose and free if it is not. Since 'purpose'
is associated in the Kantian scheme with a determinate concept under which an object is subsumed so as to be specified what kind of object it is. It is, clear that adherent beauty is associated with a concept. Kant explicitly says that free beauty “presupposes no concept of what the object should be” and adherent beauty “does presuppose such a concept” (1952, §16, 72/229 AE). To this he significantly adds that the adherent beauty concerns “perfection of the object” and it “is ascribed to Objects which come under the concept of a particular end” (Ibid). Elucidating his point he says “flowers are free beauties of nature. Hardly anyone but a botanist knows the true nature of a flower, and even he, while recognizing in the flower the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end when using his taste to judge of its beauty” (Ibid). This means that for an ordinary man a flower, that is, its re/presentation is a thing of free beauty because he is not aware of the purpose which the purposive whole serves. But for a botanist the same flower i.e. its re/presentation is an object of adherent beauty because he is aware of the purpose it serves though his aesthetic experience of the flower has nothing to do with his awareness of the purpose in the sense he has abstracted that purpose from that purposive whole.

Now, the question is whether the distinction between the two kinds of beauty concerns objects or our approach to them. According to Körner “the distinction between free and adherent is … not a classification of things but rather a distinction between two modes of apprehending ‘purposive’ wholes” (1955, 189). However, the issue on which Körner has taken a clear stand is not as simple as he thinks. This is because Kant himself classifies aesthetic objects as objects of free beauty and objects of adherent beauty. In fact, he gives examples of objects belonging to one of the two kinds, though some of these examples may look somewhat arbitrary. Flowers, some birds, ornaments, non-
verbal music are objects of free beauty since they possess no meaning and represent nothing. Objects such as human beings, horses, buildings like churches and palaces are objects of adherent beauty.

However, the most difficult issue concerns the question whether Kant is justified in making room for adherent beauty whose characterization by Kant seems to be completely ill at ease with the core of his theory of beauty. This point needs to be elaborated.

Kantian scholars like Körner who maintain that the distinction between free and adherent beauty concerns not aesthetic objects but our modes of apprehending them seem to think that experience of adherent beauty involves awareness of the purpose which is abstracted from experience. A flower is experienced by a botanist as beautiful because he experiences it as purposiveness without purpose. However, that flower is an object of adherent beauty because he is aware of the purpose which that purposive whole serves though he disconnects or abstracts his awareness of that purpose from his experience. First of all, it is very difficult to understand how one can disconnect or abstract the awareness of the purpose. Secondly, even if it is possible to do so in the case of some objects like flower it is next to impossible in the case of most of the aesthetic objects. For instance, it is impossible to appreciate the beauty of a church without associating the object with its function. “The purposes intrinsic to the objects themselves … limit the way we may judge their beauty” (Kalar 2006, 84). If this is so, experience of an object of so-called adherent beauty involves reference to a purpose and hence a concept. Consequently, a judgement about an object of adherent beauty becomes what Kant calls a judgement about perfection which is about an object which serves a definite purpose. Kant explicitly maintains that a pure judgement of taste is no way akin to a judgement about perfection which is in fact is akin to an ‘impure’ judgement of taste, viz. judgement
about the (none-ethical) good. This is the main trust of Kant's contention that pure judgements of taste do not involve determinate concepts and the representation of ends.

All this shows how the very notion of adherent beauty is too problematic to be glossed over by saying that the distinction between free and adherent beauty is only one of our modes of apprehending the purposive wholes. One has to admit that such a distinction concerns the aesthetic objects themselves. But the object of adherent beauty conflicts with Kant's idea of beauty as purposiveness without purpose. Either Kant has to confine beauty to only objects of free beauty and hence disavow the very distinction between free and adherent beauty or he has to give a very weak content to the notion of 'presupposing a concept of what the object is meant to be'-a notion associated with objects of adherent beauty. Obviously, Kant would prefer the latter option which is articulated by Kalar. According to Kalar, such a concept which involves subsumption of the object under the concept of its purpose provides “merely a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for its being an instance of adherent beauty. That is, thinking the object through the concept of a purpose of which it is the fulfillment somehow circumscribes or constrains the freedom of the imagination in making the judgement of beauty, but is not sufficient in itself to occasion a pleasure” (2006, 85). The trouble with Kalar's strategy is that when we experience beauty or make a pure judgement of taste we do not go by considerations of necessary and sufficient conditions. Kalar's strategy in no way does justice to the real situations of our aesthetic life. Kalar's approach is similar to the now discredited positivist attempt to explicate theoretical concepts in science in terms of the necessary and sufficient conditions of their application. The post-positivist philosophers of science like Kuhn and Feyerabend have shown that neither such conditions can be specified, nor even if they are specified, they are irrelevant to actual
application of those concepts. A better strategy in favor of Kant is provided by Allison. According to him, to say that an object of adherent beauty presupposes a concept (in referring to a purpose) is to say that it is “an ingredient in a larger whole, which involves the thought of the purpose served by the object” (2001, 142) (Whereas an object of free beauty is apprehended in its own terms). Allison's strategy does justice to the fact that it is very difficult to abstract or completely play down the purpose of a purposive whole in looking upon the latter as an object of beauty. A minor problem with Allison strategy is that while it rightly rejects the claim of scholars like Körner that the distinction between free and adherent beauty concerns our moods of approaching the purposive wholes or our modes of judgement about them, it reject the Kantian idea that the distinction concerns the aesthetic objects themselves. However, Allison has provided a plausible ground for retaining the distinction. One may ask, “Why Kant's distinction between free and adherent beauty be retained at all instead of rejecting the very notion of adherent beauty?” After all, it is only objects of free beauty that fit perfectly the Kantian scheme of the beautiful central to which is his claim that the apprehension of the beautiful does not involve the application of a determinate concept. Free beauty is free in the sense its experience is not constrained by a concept.

One answer to the above question is that Kant himself maintains that adherent beauty is an instance of ideal of beauty. We may overlook Kant's point because he is not clear about the ideal of beauty\(^1\). The second answer to the above question can be more convincing. Kant himself is convinced that the distinction between the free and the adherent beauty can be invoked effectively in the analysis and resolution of aesthetic disagreements. If two parties differ in their aesthetic judgement and if neither party can

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\(^1\) In fact, his idea of human figures as the ideal of beauty is, to say the least, is simply baffling.
be said to be correct, one way of resolving the conflict is by saying that one party is
making a judgement about free beauty and the other of adherent beauty and hence the
evaluations can be consistent with each other.

**III.4 Beauty and Ugliness**

In this section we deal with a contentious issue. The issue concerns the question
whether Kant's aesthetic scheme has a place for our experience of ugliness. According to
many Kantian scholars, Kant's aesthetic scheme does not have a proper place for ugliness
even though he seeks to provide some place to it. It is natural that Kant does intend to
give some place to it for the simple reason that it is a matter of fact that we do experience
ugliness and, consequently, make judgements about ugliness. This apart, at a more
fundamental level the idea of ugliness has a deep philosophical meaning evidenced by the
fact that philosophers of religion and religiously oriented philosophers have considered
the problem of evil to be a challenging one and evil expresses itself not only as error in
logic, and sin in ethics but also as ugliness in aesthetics. Allison rightly points out that if
Kant does not recognize ugliness his insistence “that we can quarrel about taste, though
we cannot dispute about it, would lose its sense” (2001, 71).

Allison alludes in this connection to Kant's characterization of ugliness as “negative
beauty” (Ibid) though Kant uses this term in connection with sublimity (cf. 1952, §23,
91/245 AE). He draws our attention to the fact that in his later writings Kant invokes
what can be called ‘a three valued logic of taste’. He quotes Kant's remark “That which
pleases through mere intuition is beautiful, that which leaves me indifferent in intuition
… is non-beautiful; that which displeases me in intuition is ugly” (Allison 2001, 72).
Allison draws our attention to Kant's characterization of the relation between virtue and vice as one of real opposition and the relation between virtue and non-virtue as one of mere logical opposition and rightly points out that “there is no reason to expect that he would not also characterize the opposition between the beautiful and the ugly in the same way” (Ibid), i.e. as real opposition.

But from all this it does not necessarily follow that Kant has logical space for accommodating ugliness in a manner that fits negatively into his lexicon of beauty. In other words, we face the question; “Does he consider our judgements about ugliness as negative pure judgements of taste standing in a reversal relation with positive pure judgements of taste, i.e. judgements about the beautiful?” and, what amounts to the same thing, “Does he consider experience of ugliness as negative pure experience of beauty in opposition to positive pure aesthetic experience, that is, experience of the beautiful?” The majority of Kantian scholars give a negative response to this question since according to them Kant's characterization of ugliness as negative beauty is too facile a basis for a positive answer to this question. Before we discuss this response in detail let us recall that the four partial definitions or moments which Kant has given about beauty and its experience are supposed to distinguish a pure judgement of taste from impure judgements of taste (i.e. judgements about the agreeable and judgements about non-ethical good) and hence pure aesthetic experience from impure aesthetic experience (i.e. experience of mere agreeableness and experience of functional perfection of a thing liked by us). For this reason a judgement about the ugliness cannot be considered to be an impure judgement of taste and experience of ugliness cannot be considered to be impure aesthetic experience. This means that a judgement about ugliness/experience of ugliness must share some features of the judgements about the beautiful/experience of the
beautiful even while traversing the opposite ground by not sharing some of the other features of the latter.

Let us assume for the time being that in Kant's aesthetic scheme this is actually so. As we have seen, in a nutshell, Kant's characterization of experience of beauty involves (a) a feeling of universally sharable pleasure that arises out of a harmonious and free play of imagination and understanding; (b) disinterestedness in the sense of not involving the application of a determinate concept; (c) purposiveness without purpose and (d) a delight whose universal sharability is necessary (not contingent) thanks to its having a locus in our human nature. If Kant's scheme can accommodate our experience of the ugly it “must be structurally identical to … the beautiful and differentiated only in that it is based on the feeling of displeasure rather than pleasure, feelings that both come about through the harmonious free play of the faculties” (McConnell 2008, 207). In other words, it seems as though we can resolve the issue mentioned in the beginning of the section by saying that in the Kantian scheme experience of the ugliness involves (a) the feeling of universally sharable displeasure arising out of harmonious and free play of imagination and understanding, (b) disinterestedness, (c) purposiveness, and (d) necessary displeasure. The (b) and (c) make the experience of ugliness stand on par with the experience of beauty and therefore make it a pure aesthetic experience. But (a) and (d) make it so non-congruent with the experience of beauty that it stands on the opposite pole.

However, the matter is not as simple as it is made above. This is because a contradiction is involved in such a resolution of the issue. The experience of the ugly must involve universally and necessarily sharable displeasure so as to radically differ from the experience of the beautiful. But such displeasure must be taken to have arised
out of a harmonious and free play of imagination and understanding since without the latter the experience of the ugly will not be a pure aesthetic experience. In other words, we are forced to admit that both the experience of ugliness and the experience of beauty involve a harmonious and free play between imagination and understanding which in one case produces universally and necessarily sharable pleasure and in another case its exact opposite. Perhaps Kant himself anticipated such a contradiction and hence maintains that there was a necessary relation between pleasure on the one hand and harmonious and free play between imagination and understanding, on the other.

But if we go by the position of Kant mentioned above we cannot make room for experience of ugliness as a pure aesthetic experience. This has led to the view best articulated by Guyer according to which a judgement about the ugliness is not a pure aesthetic judgement, that is, pure judgement of taste but is an impure one and consequently experience of ugliness is an impure aesthetic experience. This view is unsatisfactory because the locutions like impure judgements of taste and impure aesthetic experience fit judgements about and/or experience of merely agreeable or merely perfect (not-ethical good). But the judgements about and experience of ugliness has nothing to do with judgements about and experience of the merely agreeable and the functionally perfect.

Guyer's contention that there cannot be, in the Kantian scheme, such a thing like negative pure aesthetic judgement/negative pure aesthetic experience because there is a necessary relation between pleasure, on the one hand and the harmonious and free play between of imagination and understanding, on the other, has been opposed by many Kantian scholars. Some of them claim that the Kantian scheme can accommodate ugliness by characterizing ugliness as involving absence of contra-finality or contra-
purposiveness produced by disharmonious and free play of imagination and understanding. This is the view of Wenzel and Allison (Cf. Wenzel 1999, 421 and Cf. Allison 2001, 54). According to Allison the relation between imagination and understanding “need not be harmonious, as is evident not only from Kant's characterization of the potential for conflict between the ‘two friends’, but also from … [Kant's claim] that the imagination and understanding can either further or hinder one another. In short, by including the latter as something that can be felt in reflection, presumably with a sense of displeasure, Kant provides the basis for negative judgements of taste” (2001, 54).

But Allison's notion of disharmonious and free play of imagination and understanding is highly problematic. In Kant's own framework the two faculties need harmonization to have a free play. In empirical experience imagination and understanding, according to Kant, have a harmonious play but the play is not free and Kant calls it ‘just a play’. He reserves the epithet ‘free’ to the harmonious play of imagination and understanding in aesthetic experience. This means play unlike free play takes place where understanding constraints imagination by the application of determinate concepts. Thus, according to Kant, the harmony of imagination and understanding is a precondition of both objective and aesthetic experience. As McConnell says “For Kant, the term ‘harmony’ or ‘harmonious’ is just a marker for correct or proper intellectual endeavor on the part of the imagination and the understanding: the attempt, successful or not, but with the real potential to be successful, to gain knowledge” (2008, 215).

Hence, it is not correct to distinguish experience of ugliness from experience of beauty by saying that the kind of play of imagination and understanding in the former is
disharmonious and in the latter it is harmonious. So, Guyer has not convincingly shown that the Kantian scheme of the aesthetic has a place for experience of ugliness in the negative pole as opposed to the positive pole in which we can locate our experience of beauty. In other, words he has not shown how our experience of ugliness is a pure aesthetic experience in a negative way.

Some Kantian scholars like Wenzel and Hudson adopt a different strategy to achieve what Guyer failed to achieve. The strategy may be called the strategy of contra-purposiveness. According to their view “ugly is an object's form of contra-purposiveness insofar as it is perceived in the object without the presentation of a purpose” (Hudson 1991, 93). This is to say that our experience of ugliness is pure, though negative, aesthetic experience because it involves all the elements of the experience of the beauty that Kant has identified except that of purposiveness; in fact, it involves the opposite of purposiveness. However, this strategy is inadequate because the object of ugliness so construed will frustrate the role of imagination which consists in detecting an order or a law which is different from what understanding can do in empirical experience. In other words, an object of aesthetic experience, beautiful or otherwise, must be able to display a design imposed by imagination which is recognized but not formulable by understanding since formulizability involves application of determinate concepts. This is what Kant meant by ‘a law without a law’. As McConnell says “For Kant, in order to be an object of representation, an object must have some form, it must promise some rule that the understanding can grasp in order for it to come to the attention of the finality-detecting imagination in the first place” (2008, 216). If imagination is deprived of this role we cannot have anything like pure aesthetic experience. For, the object then will be devoid of anything like a form. It can’t even be formless because we do not consider object of
ugliness to be formless since ‘formless’ is not a negative concept. McConnell considers ‘deformed’ as a suitable concept in connection with ugliness.

In the light of the above considerations we will be forced to go beyond Kant's characterization of beauty in order to accommodate our experience of ugliness within his aesthetic scheme. In short we cannot construe ugliness as the opposite pole of beauty. This does not mean that we have to go beyond the very framework of Kantian aesthetic provided we consider that framework to be something more than Kant's definition of beauty. The most promising notion in this connection is that of aesthetic ideas. To quote Kant himself “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” (1952, §49, 175-176/314 AE). Equally fundamental is Kant's claim “Beauty (whether it be of nature or of art) may in general be termed the expression of aesthetic ideas” (Ibid, §51, 183/320 AE). It is to the credit of McConnell who has brought these ideas of Kant for an adequate Kantian characterization of the ugliness. McConnell is right in concluding that an object of the experience of ugliness is something whose form fails to express an aesthetic idea. The displeasure it produces is due to its failure to express an aesthetic idea and not because it is not a product of the harmonious and free play of imagination and understanding; nor is it because it fails to possess the form of purposiveness. Our experience of ugliness is pure aesthetic experience because it does involve the features just mentioned. But it is diametrically opposed to that of pure experience of beauty because it involves the failure to express an aesthetic idea. Hence, what distinguishes our experience of ugliness from the experience of beauty is not purity but failure to express an aesthetic idea.
III.5 Beauty and Sublimity

In our discussion of the various kinds of aesthetic judgements or judgements of taste in chapter II we briefly dealt with the judgements about the sublime. In that connection it was pointed out that judgements about the agreeable and judgements about (non-ethical) good, that is, judgements about perfection (of a liked object as a means to a desired end) may be called impure judgements of taste or impure aesthetic judgements whereas judgements about the beautiful may be called, as Kant himself does, pure judgements of taste or pure aesthetic judgements. It was also pointed out that Kant has an ambiguous position on the question whether the judgements about the sublime are pure or not. In view of Kant's ambiguous stance we characterized judgements of sublime as semi-pure judgements of taste. Our characterization is justified because the judgements about the sublime are definitely not impure aesthetic judgements because they are neither judgement about mere agreeableness nor are they judgements about ‘existence’ of objects. Further they share many of the defining features of pure judgements of taste, that is, judgements about the beautiful, as we shall see. As we shall also see the former do not share some defining features of the latter. Form this it follows that the experience of the sublime is partly pure and partly not.

It must be admitted that ‘sublime’ did not remain a significant theme in the post Kantian aesthetics. Of course, today it is not even a point of discussion. There may be many reasons for this development. One reason, according to Körner, “for its fading away from the philosophic scene is … mainly the recognition that a neat dichotomy of aesthetic experience into those of the beautiful and those of the sublime misrepresents their great variety and their affinities” (1955, 189). Körner also accounts for the waning
of interest in the sublime as a result of general decline of interest in aesthetics among philosophers. However, the discussion of Kant's view of the sublime can be important today because we can transform Kant's distinction between the beautiful and the sublime in a way “which admits of a large region of hybrids between the beautiful and the sublime [which can be useful and illuminating]” (Ibid, 190). Secondly, the present day decline of the interest of philosophers in aesthetics need not warrant a complete indifference to Kant's idea of sublimity. This is because philosophical interest in aesthetics may be revived and in fact has already revived. Metaphysics suffered a complete indifference by philosophers in 20th century, particularly in the Anglo-American world. But there is a tremendous revival of interest in metaphysics even in the analytical tradition. In fact, the condition of aesthetics is much better even today than that of metaphysics till recently. Unlike metaphysics it was neglected but not reviled.

After these remarks made above regarding contemporary relevance of the Kantian view of the sublime it is necessary to note two points: (a) Kant's concerns with the sublime was not incidental to his aesthetics engagement but central to it, as evidenced by his conviction that the sublime is more primarily related with morality or moral experience than does the beautiful; and (b) Kant's engagement with the sublime very palpably expresses an approach unique to his mode of philosophizing. Some of the predecessors of Kant like Longinus and his contemporaries like Edmund Burke engaged in a deep reflection on the nature of the sublime. Hence, Kant was not the first to initiate such an endeavor but his importance in relation to a philosophical engagement with sublimity lies in providing a new approach to it. He convincingly shows how their approach to sublime was physiological and psychological and therefore not philosophical, in the same way in the which Locke's approach to knowledge which
according to Kant was only physiological and psychological. Such a recognition led Kant to what he called a transcendental inquiry in the nature of the sublime, thus squarely fitting with the fundamental spirit and orientation of his philosophical system as a whole.

Kant confines sublimity to nature with which beauty is also associated (whereas in the works of art there is no place for sublimity). The question is, “How does Kant distinguish between the experience of the beautiful and the experience of the sublime?” Of course, both experiences involve a kind of feeling of pleasure which is generalizable and disinterested in the specifically Kantian sense of not having anything to do with the existence of an object and hence the application of any determinate concepts; both kinds of experience are described by singular judgements; further, like experience of and judgement about beauty, experience of and judgement about the sublimity have an a priori principle underlying them. However, according to Kant, beauty and sublimity differ in some important ways. First of all “The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality. Accordingly the beautiful seems to be regarded as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of understanding, the sublime as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason” (1952, §23, 90-91/244 AE). In this way Kant strengthens the architectonic structure of his system.

Before going to the second point we may note that some scholars think that because the sublime does not concern form it has only to do with feeling rather than taste. For instance, Kirwan says, “Kant does not … propose categorizing the sublime as a taste, but rather as a feeling. One of the principle reasons for this distinction is the difference he
posits between the beautiful and the sublime in their respective relationships to form (2004, 59-60). However, Kirwan contradicts himself when he argues that the sublime which according to him does not concern taste is akin to dependent beauty which being one kind of beauty concerns taste. More importantly, if Kant considers the sublime as unrelated to taste but only related to feeling he would not have insisted upon the cultivation of the sense of the sublime. After all, we cultivate taste and not feelings. This is clear when he emphasizes this point in view of the fact that it is easier to get concurrence of others regarding a judgement about beautiful than regarding the judgement about the sublime. As he says, unlike in the case of judgement about the beautiful “in respect of our judgement upon the sublime in nature we cannot so easily vouch for ready acceptance by others. For a far higher degree of culture, not merely of the aesthetic judgement, but also of the faculties of cognition which lie at its basis, seems to be requisite” (1952, §29, 115/264 AE).

Secondly, though both the experience of beautiful and the experience of the sublime have the feeling of pleasure at their core, the nature of the feeling of the pleasure is different in the two kinds of experience. Pleasure in the case of the former is directly connected to the furtherance of life and therefore it is undiluted. Hence, Kant claims that though beauty is different from charm, experience of beauty is compatible with it. By contrast the feeling of pleasure associated with the sublime is a diluted one. In fact the state of mind associated with the sublime swings between attraction and repulsion and hence sublimity is incompatible with charm. This is what Kant means when he says “since the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternatively repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect, i.e. merits the name of a negative pleasure” (Ibid, §23, 91/245 AE).
The experience of a beautiful flower is one of admiration whereas the experience of stormy sea is one of sublimity because the pleasure associated with is mixed with a feeling of horror or awesomeness.

Thirdly “Whereas natural beauty (such as is self-subsisting) conveys a finality [i.e. purposiveness ] in its form making the object appear, as it were, preadapted to our power of judgement, so that it thus forms of itself an object of our delight, that which, without our indulging in any refinements of thought, but, simply in our apprehension of it, excites the feeling of the sublime, may appear, indeed, in point of form to contravene the ends of our power of judgement, to be ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to be, as it were, an outrage on the imagination, and yet it is judged all the more sublime on that account” (Ibid ). This means that the sublime is devoid of purposiveness which is so central to the beautiful. Since purposiveness is associated with form, obviously beauty concerns form and sublimity concerns the formless (and, as we have seen, ugliness concerns what is deformed). In this connection Allison uses the term ‘counterpurposive’ in connection with Kant’s characterization of sublimity as devoid of purposiveness. However, since the experience of the sublime is an aesthetic experience it must involve some kind of purposiveness. So, Kant has to claim that sublimity involves counterpurposive purposiveness. In this connection Allison says “if the paradox underlying Kant’s account of the beautiful is that of a purposiveness without purpose, underlying the sublime is the seemingly even more paradoxical conception of a counterpurposive purposiveness” (2001, 310 ). However, Allison seems to be off the mark. The first one is not a paradox at all as purposiveness concerns only the form or design which is so well elaborated by Kant. The second paradox Kant has resolved by invoking the concept of ‘higher finality’ or ‘higher purposiveness’ when he says that in
the case of the sublime “the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility, and employ itself upon idea involving higher finality” (1952, §23, 92/246 AE). Of course, we must admit that Kant in resolving the second paradox makes a puzzling claim. According to him, sublimity is to be found only in the mind. To quote Kant “the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, can not be contained in any sensuous form … [T]he broad ocean agitated by storm can not be called sublime” (Ibid, §23, 92/245 AE). This is to say sublimity is to be ascribed to ourselves, that is, to our capacities and ideas; it is ascribed to nature only derivatively or by what Kant calls ‘subreption’.

In fact, it is here that we face a puzzle and not so much where Allison finds. As we have seen, according to Kant, it is sublime and not beauty which is in the mind. For “we express ourselves on the whole inaccurately if we term any Object of nature sublime, although we may with perfect propriety call many such objects beautiful” (Ibid, §23, 91-92/245 AE). In fact, Kant makes this even more explicit when he says “For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves, but for the sublime one merely in ourselves and the attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature” (Ibid, §23, 93/246 AE). This is puzzling because according to Kant the object of pure aesthetic experience is not an object but the purposive form of the objects’ representations; that is to say, beauty is not one of perceptual features of the object. This puzzle is stronger for those who maintain that pure judgements of taste are only subjective and the experience of beauty is partly subjective, though the puzzle is not so strong for those who maintain the view espoused in this thesis, namely, that pure judgements of taste and hence pure aesthetic experience, that is, experience of beauty, are objective in non-empirical sense. However, even the latter faced the challenge of explaining Kant’s puzzling statement that beauty is about objects and sublimity is not.
Allison seems to explain Kant’s position by saying that in the case of the sublime “the liking arises in spite of the appearance of the object, not because of it” (2001, 311). By this he means that in the case of the beautiful the liking arises because of the appearance of the object. In other words Allison’s point is that whereas what is liked in the experience of the beautiful is the form of its representation whereas “What is actually liked in the experience of the sublime is, rather, the feeling of one’s supersensible nature that is occasioned by the perception of such objects as stormy oceans, snow covered mountains, or erupting volcanoes” (Ibid). Allison’s point is well taken. However, a more Kantian way of dealing with the puzzling character of his view mentioned above is the following: as we have seen, according to Kant, when we call something beautiful the referent is not the object but the purposiveness of its form. What is involved in such an instance is the idea of ‘as if’, that is to say, when we speak of beauty we are speaking ‘as if’ we are speaking of a perceptible feature of an object without being aware of that fact and therefore ‘as if’ is constitutive of our judgement about the beautiful. That is the reason for Kant to consider our belief that when we speak of beauty we are speaking of an object with beauty as its attribute to be understandable though not philosophically justified. But the ‘as if’ is not available to our judgements about the sublime. For Kant it does not even make sense to speak of objects as if they are sublime. It is conceptually incoherent to do so.

What is said above speaks of the complexity of sublimity and its experience. It is this complexity which is responsible for the paradoxes, puzzles and obscurities which many scholars read in Kant’s exposition of the sublime. The complexity has its roots in the contradiction-ridden relation between the sublime and the aesthetic agent. This point deserves some elaboration.
It is clear that the sublime strikes us by reminding us of the limitations of our sensuous relation with nature but at the same time “the sense of limitation entails the sense of it’s opposite, the fact that we also have a capacity for Reason not limited by sensuousness” (Bowie 1990, 37). We feel our limits and thereby feel what is not limited in us. In fact, without the latter the former would be impossible. To quote Bowie again “the sublime only provides a reminder that whatever our sensuously based thinking produces is inherently inadequate as a means of understanding the supersensuous basis of ourselves and nature” (Ibid, 38, emphasize added). Kant is at his poetic best when he says speaking of the mighty forces of nature, “provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature” (1852, §28, 110-111/261 AE). While realizing our own limitlessness even while experiencing our limits in the face of mighty nature, our encounter with the sublime has to generate the feeling of fear without being so scared as to turn away. Kant says that it is like fearing God while not being afraid of Him. Further, being an aesthetic experience our experience of the sublime involves the role of imagination. But at the same time our imagination is mocked at by the object that produces the feeling of the sublime. Added to this is the demand that we distance ourselves from any fear that we feel even while contemplating its fearfulness. It is such pulls in opposite directions in more than one way that makes our experience of the sublime most complex unlike the experience of the beautiful.
This brings us to the end of our discussion of Kant’s theory of beauty including Kant’s theory of the sublime. The thesis has not touched upon, in this chapter, Kant’s views regarding the relation between the beautiful and the sublime on the one hand and morality/moral experience on the other. This will be discussed in chapter V wherein we dwell upon the bearing of Kant’s aesthetic theory on aesthetic education.