

“*Lebensgefühl* and *Geistesgefühl* in Kant’s Aesthetics”

Abstract

The aim of this presentation is to show that the theory of the aesthetic feeling in Kant provides a complete portrait of the concept of life of the human being: through the beautiful and the sublime, Kant accounts for the human twofold constitution that is sensibly affected in the natural world yet grounded on a supersensible dimension.

The aesthetic judgment is a subjective judgment since it deals with a representation that is «related entirely to the subject, indeed to its feeling of life, under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure» (*KU* 5: 204, §1). The feeling of life (*Lebensgefühl*) makes feel the subject alive insofar as the representation of an object awakens its cognitive faculties and put them in a free yet harmonious relationship, providing an affective appraisal of himself as a rational yet embodied being.

This definition of the feeling of life sheds light on both pleasure and displeasure, but when Kant refers to the *Lebensgefühl* it seems it deals mainly with a pleasure brought by the beautiful, as the promotion of a pure pleasant state of mind wherein the subject wants to linger. On the other hand, the dynamic between pleasure and displeasure is conveyed by the feeling of spirit (*Geistesgefühl*) which is presented by Kant in the frame of the sublime: the feeling of spirit involves an initial displeasure followed by a pleasure that makes the vital powers even stronger.

In this regard, Alix Cohen distinguishes between the promotion and the inhibition of life: in the first case there is a furtherance of the activity of the human being which pleases, while in the latter there is something that hinders the activity and it is felt as a displeasure. Cohen also distinguishes the feeling of life from the vital powers as a key point that differentiates the beautiful from the sublime and claims that the beautiful accounts for our embodied condition as part of the nature, while the sublime highlights our supersensible dimension as independent from nature. Also Angelica Nuzzo points out the aesthetic pleasure of beauty as the distinctive mark of our embodied yet rational constitution, thus it accounts for the human life, whose difference from animal life can be caught through a transcendental principle.

Nevertheless, by following Zammito’s interpretation, I would like to stress that the feeling of life of human beings becomes even worthy insofar as it is related to the feeling of spirit, since only through this tension it is possible to grasp the supersensible side of human life. Thanks to the *Geistesgefühl*, the well-being expressed by the feeling of life can be properly taken as a good one because it is considered by reason with reference to purpose (cf. *KU* 5: 205, §4). Thus the beauty triggers the feeling of life of human beings as distinguished by animals as well as by spirits, but the

twofold constitution that makes worthy the human feeling of life comes from the recognition of the rational ground enlightened by the *Geistesgefühl*.