An Iroquois in Paris and a Crusoe on a Desert Island: Kant's Aesthetics and the Process of Civilization

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Abstract

In section 2 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) Immanuel Kant refers to the Iroquois sachem declaring that what pleased him in Paris were cook-shops, not palaces. For Kant the sachem seems to be a barbarian ensnared by his appetite and incapable of disinterested pleasure. This essay, however, argues first that Kant, extracting this episode from “The History of New France” (1744) written by French Jesuit missionary Charlevoix, tacitly advocates the idea of the noble savage, thereby giving the Iroquois sachem the function of criticizing a luxurious civilization. Second, the essay shows that in the “General Remark on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments” Kant evaluates positively a castaway Crusoe as a person who withdraws from civilized society, conscious of the fact that society is far from being a moral ideal. The Iroquois sachem and the castaway Crusoe are examples that anticipate section 83 in the second part of his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which focuses on the role of the faculty of taste in the process of civilization, thereby incorporating into his whole system the theory of taste as expounded in the first part.

Keywords

disinterestedness of taste – process of civilization – noble savage – critique of luxury

1 Introduction

In section 2 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790)¹ Kant evokes the Iroquois sachem who finds a cook-shop in Paris more pleasing than a palace. The main theme of section 2 entitled “The satisfaction that determines the judgment of taste is without any interest” is that the “existence of the object” does not matter for the “judgment of taste,” and the “faculty of desire” that takes “interest” in the “existence of the object” cannot therefore determine the judgment of taste.² The Iroquois sachem seems to epitomize the barbarian ensnared by his own appetite and incapable of making a judgment of taste. This is why little attention has been paid to this passage in secondary literature.

In the last few years, however, there have been several studies on Kant’s references to the Iroquois from sections 2 and 41. Most studies interpret, largely in a critical way, Kant’s examples as representative of how he – or more generally modern Europeans – regarded “indigenous” populations, while other studies focus on Kant and primitivism.³ What is lacking, however, is a clarification of how Kant’s references to the Iroquois stand within his philosophical system. The following will show that, similar to the story of the castaway Crusoe, the reference to the Iroquois sachem operates as a criticism of luxurious or decadent civilizations. It will also show that section 2 anticipates section 83, which focuses on the role of the faculty of taste in the process of civilization and incorporates Kant’s theory of taste into his whole system.

1 Kant’s works are cited according to the volume and page numbering in *Immanuel Kants Schriften, Ausgabe der königlichen preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1902-), abbreviated as AA. Unless noted otherwise, translations are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). When referring to specific works by Kant, I have followed the most common abbreviations used in the *Kant-Studien*.

2 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [KU], AA, 05: 204.

3 David Lloyd, “Race under Representation,” *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991): 62-94, took the initiative in this new issue, critically pointing out that modern philosophical anthropology provided a framework of positioning non-Europeans under the civilized Europeans. See further Karen Lang, “The Dialectics of Decay: Rereading the Kantian Subject,” *The Art Bulletin*, 79/3 (1997): 413-439; David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Tony C. Brown, *The Primitive, the Aesthetic, and the Savage: An Enlightenment Problematic* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), esp. Chap. 5. Kant’s Tattooed New Zealanders; Peter Szendy, *Kant chez les exraterrestres* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2011).

2 Kant and the Iroquois

Kant is fond of the episode of the Iroquois sachem, although he mentions it only once in his published writings, namely in section 2 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The episode, however, appears in his manuscripts and student notes from his lectures. It can first be found in his *Remarks in the 'Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime'* (1764/65): "[There arises a question] whether the savage pleased by cook-shops [*die Garküchen*] had taste."⁴ Kant concerned himself with this question in the mid-1760s.

Kant's aesthetic theory takes a particular shape in 1769/70, twenty years before the publication of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Without going into detail, which would be beyond the scope of this essay, Kant's distinction between form and matter of sensibility leads him to differentiate the universal judgment of taste pertaining to form from the private judgment of taste based on matter. That is, he differentiates between the beautiful and the agreeable. Within this scheme of thought, Kant often refers to the question arising from the anecdote of the Iroquois sachem in his 1770s and 1780s lectures on logic, anthropology and metaphysics:

E.g., a house is beautiful not because it gratifies through intuition (for here a [cook-shop] is perhaps more gratifying to many); but rather because it is an object of universal satisfaction, because thousands can have a gratification in one and the same object.⁵

The same negative perspective can be found in section 2 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*:

But if the question is whether something is beautiful, one does not want to know whether there is anything that is or that could be at stake, for us or for someone else, in the existence of the thing, but rather how we judge it in mere contemplation (intuition or reflection). If someone asks me whether I find the palace that I see before me beautiful, I may well say that I don't like that sort of thing, which is made merely to be gaped at, or, like the Iroquois sachem, that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the [cook-shop]; in true *Rousseauesque* style I might even vilify the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on such superfluous

⁴ Kant, *AA* 20: 71 (my translation).

⁵ Kant, *Metaphysik L1* (Heinze) [*V-Met/Heinze*], *AA* 28: 251 (translation slightly modified). See also Kant, *AA* 24/1: 353-54; *AA* 25: 43-44; and *AA* 25: 1247.

things; finally I could even easily convince myself that if I were to find myself on an uninhabited island, without any hope of ever coming upon human beings again, and could conjure up such a magnificent structure through my mere wish, I would not even take the trouble of doing so if I already had a hut that was comfortable enough for me. All of this might be conceded to me and approved; but that is not what is at issue here. One only wants to know whether the mere representation of the object is accompanied with satisfaction in me, however indifferent I might be with regard to the existence of the object of this representation.⁶

Kant cites four examples regarding the judgment of taste based on interest, asserting that “this is not what is at issue here.” He then interrupts the argument as if to prevent readers from inquiring further into these examples.

Kant continued to make references to the Iroquois in section 41 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* entitled “On the empirical interest in the beautiful.” There is, in fact, a correlation between sections 2 and 41, to which Kant already alludes in a note:

A judgment on an object of satisfaction can be entirely *disinterested* yet still very *interesting*, i.e., it is not grounded on any interest but it produces an interest.... Only in society does it become *interesting* to have taste, the reason for which will be indicated in the sequel.⁷

In other words, the judgment of taste should not be grounded on interest; rather, once a judgment is made it can arouse interest. The (admissible) relationship between the judgment of taste and interest can therefore be conceived only after the analysis and deduction (justification) of the judgment of taste, namely after section 40 where the “deduction of judgment of taste” is completed. It follows that referring again to the Iroquois in section 41 becomes a necessity:

For himself alone a human being abandoned on a desert island would not adorn either his hut or himself, nor seek out or still less plant flowers in order to decorate himself; rather, only in society does it occur to him to be not merely a human being but also, in his own way, a refined human being (the beginning of civilization): for this is how we judge someone who is inclined to communicate his pleasure to others

6 Kant, *KU*, AA 05: 204-05 (translation slightly modified).

7 Ibid., 205n.

and is skilled at it, and who is not content with an object if he cannot feel his satisfaction in it in community with others. Further, each expects and requires of everyone else a regard to universal communication, as if from an original contract dictated by humanity itself; and thus, at first to be sure only charms, e.g., colors for painting oneself (roucou among the Caribs and cinnabar among the Iroquois), or flowers, mussel shells, beautifully colored birds' feathers, but with time also beautiful forms (as on canoes, clothes, etc.) that do not in themselves provide any gratification, i.e., satisfaction of enjoyment, become important in society and combined with great interest, until finally civilization that has reached the highest point makes of this almost the chief work of refined inclination, and sensations have value only to the extent that they may be universally communicated; at that point, even though the pleasure that each has in such an object is merely inconsiderable and has in itself no noticeable interest, nevertheless the idea of its universal communicability almost infinitely increases its value.⁸

The gist of Kant's argument is to relate the universal communicability of the aesthetic pleasure to the process of civilization. What caused pleasure at the beginning of civilization was only something pertaining to matter, such as the charm of colors. Throughout time, the source was to be found in beautiful forms. And ultimately, at the highest stage of civilization, the idea of universal communicability of pleasure itself became the main cause of pleasure. In such a development process of civilization, the Iroquois is seen as being inferior. In addition to mentioning a castaway Crusoe, the similarity between section 41 and section 2 is obvious.

However, a closer examination reveals dissimilarities. In section 2 Kant enumerates four different attitudes toward the palace. Compared with the three other examples – the cynic, the critic Rousseau and the utopia castaway⁹ – the example of the Iroquois sachem does not merely suggest a savage taste (or lack of taste); it rather functions as a criticism of the decadence represented by the palace.

Regarding the quotation from section 41, we have to recall section 16 where Kant distinguishes “free beauty” (i.e., free from a determinate concept) from

⁸ Ibid., 297.

⁹ David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 154.

“adherent beauty” (i.e., dependent on a determinate concept).¹⁰ The beauty of human being comes thus under the category of adherent beauty:

[T]he beauty of human being (and in this species that of a man, a woman, or a child), ... presuppose[s] a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection, and is thus merely adherent beauty.... [A] figure could be beautified with all sorts of curlicues and light but regular lines, as the New Zealanders do with their tattooing, if only it were not a human being.¹¹

Kant's point that to ornament the human figure with various pigments is not appropriate for human beings also seems to apply to the Iroquois. In section 41, however, Kant does not disparage the value of such an ornamentation; he regards it as a beginning of civilization, distinguishing thus the Iroquois from a castaway Crusoe who is thought to predate the process of civilization. In a text written between 1772 and ca. 1775, Kant argues that a human being becomes mannered [*gesittet*] out of compulsion of politeness: “Without this compulsion, everything would be crude, unmannered and coarse. Even the Caribs say that they are still naked because they are not yet painted with roucou.”¹² The Caribs' painting on their body is not rejected as something against what it means to be a human being. The painting is on the contrary regarded as contributing to making human beings human. And what applies to the Caribs must also apply to the Iroquois.

To understand Kant's interpretation, it is necessary to expound how the Iroquois were represented in eighteenth century Europe.

3 The Iroquois as Philosophers

Kant drew the episode of the Iroquois sachem from François-Xavier Charlevoix (1682-1761) in his *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (Vol. 3, 1744).¹³

Some Iroquois who went to Paris in 1666, and who after being shown all the royal houses, and all the fine things of that great city, admire

10 Kant, *KU*, AA 05: 39.

11 Ibid., 230.

12 Ibid., 15: 339-39, Refl. 774 (my translation).

13 Ibid., 25: 43-44 n. See also Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. by Heinier F. Klemme (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2000), 435-36.

nothing in it; and would have preferred their villages to the capital of the most flourishing kingdom in Europe, had they not seen the street De la Huchette, where the cook's shops [*les Boutiques des Rôtisseurs*], in which they found a constant supply of all sorts of eatables, pleased them highly.¹⁴

In other words, Charlevoix depicts the Iroquois as savages ensnared in appetite. The question is why Charlevoix mentions this episode. No study has yet considered the context in which this episode is found. In the passage preceding the above quotation Charlevoix writes the following:

It must be confessed that their way of life seems at first glance very rude, but ... the liberty they enjoy compensates sufficiently the loss of those conveniences of which they are deprived.... In fact a thing in which they are most estimable and ought to be looked upon as true philosophers is, that the sight of all our conveniences, riches, and magnificence affects them so little, and that they have found out the art of easily dispensing with them.¹⁵

Charlevoix highlights the true liberty the Iroquois enjoy in contrast with the "false goods which we [i.e., the Europeans] so much admire, which we purchase at the expense of real ones, and which we so little enjoy."¹⁶ In section 2 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant puts the example of the Iroquois between those of the cynic and the critic Rousseau, echoing thus Charlevoix' original intention.

The resonance between Charlevoix' and Kant's representations can be further substantiated. In his 1781/82 lecture on anthropology, Kant contrasts savage or raw freedom to civilized or civil freedom as follows:

The English are living on the borders of the Canadian savage, whose civic freedom is big enough; they, however, do not agree with such [civic] life, so that Canadian savages who served in the English army and were advanced to officers returned again to their own nation at the end of the war. This freedom [i.e., the savages'] is an ideal enjoyment. Imagine that

14 Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (Paris: Rollin Fils, 1744), vol. 3, 322. English translation: *Journal of a Voyage to North America*, trans. and ed. Louise Phelps Kellogg (Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1923), vol. 2, 100.

15 Charlevoix, vol. 3, 321-22. English translation: vol. 2, 100.

16 Ibid.

you can do what you so desire. Generally, if individuals enjoy such freedom, they will not sacrifice it, even though it is savage freedom.¹⁷

As a matter of fact, the editors of the Berlin Academy edition, Reinhard Brandt and Werner Stark, mentioned that the episode of the Canadian savages was “not ascertained.”¹⁸ But this episode also originates from Charlevoix’s *Histoire*:

An Iroquois called La Plaque ... lived among the French for several years. He was even made a lieutenant in our [French] army, in order to induce him to remain with us, as he was a very brave man. He could not however hold out, and returned to his own nation.¹⁹

New France was ceded to Great Britain in 1763. Kant might have mistaken a period of the French army for that of the English army. We should notice here Kant’s by and large positive attitude toward the indigenous population or raw freedom found outside of European societies, which will be discussed in the section “*Critique of the Power of Judgment* and the Process of Civilization.”

More noteworthy is the following sentence subsequent to the above quotation: “Those who read *Robinson Crusoe* are like children and wish themselves to be like him because we become burdened with each society.”²⁰ Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is not a novel for children. Crusoe does not decide to voyage to a desert island. Still, this passage from an anthropology lecture anticipates section 2 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in that both relate the savage to a Crusoe.

In “General remark on the first chapter of the Analytic” Kant admires the “wild beauty” of Sumatra,²¹ against English orientalist William Marsden (1754–1831) for whom it was the “pepper gardens ... planted in even rows [by the East India Company], running parallel and at right angles with each other” that were “very beautiful” among the “magnificent wilds” of Sumatra.²² Seen from this perspective Crusoe is someone who is not satisfied with the “regularity” of the plantation of tobacco and canes where he finds himself. Crusoe recklessly

17 Kant, *Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1781/1782, Menschenkunde [V-Anth/Mensch]*, AA 25: 1144 (my translation).

18 Ibid., n. 249.

19 Charlevoix, vol. 3, 322–23. English translation: vol. 2, 101–02.

20 Kant, *V-Anth/Mensch*, AA 25: 1144 (my translation).

21 Kant, *KU*, AA 05: 243.

22 William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra, Containing an Account of the Government, Laws, Customs, and Manners of the Native Inhabitants ...* (London: Thomas Payne and Son, 1784, 2nd edition), 112–13.

undertook another voyage, seeking “wild beauty.”²³ We shall now turn to Kant’s depiction of Crusoe.

4 Transfiguration of Robinson Crusoe

By the middle of the 1760s Kant had already become acquainted with Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. In his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), he states the following:

A person of calm and self-interested industry does not even have, so to speak, the organs to be sensitive to the noble feature in a poem or in a heroic virtue; he would rather read a Robinson than a Grandison.²⁴

Here, Kant evokes the Puritan work ethic exemplified in Crusoe, rather than his solitude on a desert island.

Kant’s views on Crusoe reached a turning point when he read Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762) from the autumn of 1763 to the beginning of 1764. *Émile*’s potent influence on Kant can be traced in his *Remarks in the ‘Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime’*.²⁵

In Book III Rousseau declares in simple terms “I hate books.” But he also adds: “[T]here is one book which, to my thinking, supplies the best treatise on an education according to nature.” This book is *Robinson Crusoe*, which he gives to Émile as “the first book” to be read.²⁶ Moreover,

Robinson Crusoe on his island, deprived of the help of his fellowmen, without the means of carrying on the various arts, yet finding food, preserving his life, and procuring a certain amount of comfort; this is the thing to interest people of all ages, and it can be made attractive to children in all sorts of ways.... This state, I confess, is not that of a social being, nor is it in all probability Émile’s own [state], but he should use it as a standard of comparison for all other [states].²⁷

23 Kant, *KU*, AA 05: 242–43.

24 *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* [GSE], AA 02: 224.

25 Kant, AA 20: 44.

26 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1911), 147.

27 Rousseau, 147 (translation slightly modified).

Crusoe represents human being in the state of nature and serves as standard for evaluating the state of society; *Robinson Crusoe* is thus indispensable for educating children before they “enter” society.

For Rousseau, however, *Robinson Crusoe* is full of “irrelevant matter [*tout son fatras*].”²⁸ Interestingly, German writer Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746–1818) who admired Rousseau and translated *Émile* into German reinterpreted Defoe’s masterpiece through the lens of Rousseau’s ideas in his *Robinson Crusoe the Younger: An Instructive and Entertaining History for the Use of Children of Both Sexes* (1779–80). At the time this book was widely read, including by Kant.²⁹

In his “Preface” Campe commented the following on Rousseau’s expression “without the means of carrying on the various arts” from the aforementioned quotation:

Mr. Rousseau is mistaken here. The *Old Robinson Crusoe* has plenty of tools and instruments, which he saves from the wreck of a ship; whereas the *New Robinson Crusoe* has nothing but his head and his hands to depend on for his preservation.³⁰

Deprived of all facilities provided by civilization, the “New Robinson” exemplifies Rousseau’s ideal of children’s education. *Robinson Crusoe* reinterpreted by Rousseau and Campe influenced decisively Kant’s view on Crusoe in his lecture on anthropology.³¹

There are four dimensions to Kant’s interpretation of Crusoe. First, Crusoe is negatively regarded as a person who is deprived of taste. The Iroquois who are thought to express the dawn of civilization contrast with a castaway Crusoe who comes before the process of civilization:

If a human being were wholly alone on an island, then he would choose not according to taste but rather according to appetite. Thus only in the community of others [*Gemeinschaft Anderer*] does he have taste.³²

The point at issue here is what Kant understands by the “community of others.” In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) Kant discusses “taste”

28 Ibid.

29 Kant, *AA* 25: 1563.

30 Joachim Heinrich Campe, *The New Robinson Crusoe: An Instructive and Entertaining History for the Use of Children of Both Sexes*, translated from the French (Dublin: W. Colles, 1789), 5.

31 Kant, *V-Anth/Mensch*, *AA* 25: 1144.

32 Kant, *V-Met/Heinze*, *AA* 28: 251.

as follows: “No one in complete solitude will decorate or clean his house; he will not even do it for his own people (wife and children), but only for strangers, to show himself to advantage [*vorteilhaft*].”³³ To have taste is to make oneself “distinguished” from others in the sense Pierre Bourdieu expounded in his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (*La distinction – critique sociale du jugement*, 1979). If such was the case, however, the “community of others” that contrasts with the desert island would not be clear of vanity.

Second, a Crusoe is therefore cleared of vanity and luxury. The previously mentioned passage from section 2 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* where-by Kant argues that he would not even bother to conjure up the magnificence of a palace “if [he] already had a hut that was comfortable enough for [him].”³⁴ Similarly, the 1781/82 lecture on anthropology that discusses the “liberty” of the “savage” likens *Robinson Crusoe*’s readers to children who wish to become Crusoe to be freed from the burdens of society.³⁵ This is evidence that Kant relates Crusoe to children and the savage.

The third dimension is that our longing for a Crusoe is shadowy, as illustrated in Kant’s essay “Conjectural Beginning of Human History” (1786). The essay addresses the “*golden age* so much praised by the poets,” a state of the “pure enjoyment of a carefree life, dreamt away in laziness or frittered away in childish play.”³⁶ Such a “longing” for the golden age makes “the Robinsonades and voyages to the south sea islands so charming,”³⁷ but proves “how much boredom the thinking human being feels with his civilized life.” Kant further argues that “[t]he nullity of this wish to return to that time of simplicity and innocence” is sufficiently shown by the fact that “the human being cannot preserve himself in [the state of nature], because it is not enough for him,” favoring thus a “present [state] of trouble” instead of the lazy state of nature.³⁸ As Kant mentions in his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Defoe’s Crusoe is a “person of calm and self-interested industry” who is foreign to the “laziness” of the golden age.³⁹ A Crusoe enjoying the innocent state of nature is, therefore, a personage created by Rousseau.

33 Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* [*Anth*], AA 07: 240.

34 Kant, *KU*, AA 05, 204-05.

35 Kant, *V-Anth/Mensch*, AA 25: 1144.

36 Kant, *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte* [*MAM*], AA 08: 122.

37 For Kant’s knowledge of the south sea islands, see Tony C. Brown, op. cit., 119 and Christiane Küchler-Williams, *Erotische Paradiise: Zur europäischen Südseerezeption im 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), 49, 70.

38 Kant, *MAM*, AA 08: 122-23 (translation slightly modified).

39 Kant, *GSE*, AA 02: 224.

In his “General remark on the exposition of aesthetic reflective judgments” from *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, however, Kant refers to the “Robinsonades” to depict the “separation from all society” as “something sublime,”⁴⁰ which constitutes the fourth dimension of a Crusoe:

... the *separation from all society* is also regarded as something sublime if it rests on ideas that look beyond all sensible interest. To be self-sufficient, hence not to need society, yet without being unsociable, i.e., fleeing it, is something that comes close to the sublime, just like any superiority over needs.... [E]vidence of this [kind of misanthropy (very improperly so called)] is to be found in the tendency to withdraw from society, the fantastic with for an isolated country seat, or even (in young people) the dream of happiness in being able to pass their life on an island unknown to the rest of the world with a small family, which the novelists or poets who write Robinsonades know so well how to exploit.⁴¹

While the third dimension of a Crusoe is a shadowy product of an “empty longing” for the golden age,⁴² the fourth dimension presupposes morality because what leads him to withdraw from society is his awareness of the fact that such a society contradicts “the idea” of what it should be; a Crusoe withdraws from society “in order not to hate” it, which testifies to his “benevolence.”⁴³ Withdrawing without such a benevolence would on the contrary only amount to “misanthropy” in the proper sense, i.e., an “anthropophobia” that is “in part hateful and in part contemptible.”⁴⁴

This leads to a further question: Is such a Crusoe the epitome of benevolent misanthropy? In fact, Defoe’s Crusoe tends to wander, but not to withdraw. A clue to answering this question is found in Kant’s lectures on anthropology and, in particular, the following quote:

Who gives way with affect to an ideal that surely cannot be attained is enthusiastic.... Such a person shuns people not due to malicious intent, because he cannot tolerate them, but because he can nowhere find such people the way he would like them, no such people so grateful, so benevolent toward the whole human race. He is thus a virtuous fantast, he

40 See Joseph Trullinger, “Kant’s Neglected Account of the Virtuous Solitary,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55, 1 (2015).

41 Kant, *KU*, AA 05: 275–76 (translation slightly modified).

42 Kant, *MAM*, AA 08: 122)

43 Kant, *KU*, AA 05: 276. See also Refl. 989 (AA 15: 434).

44 Ibid., 275–76.

pursues the ideal with affect.... [S]ince [such enthusiasts] cannot find such [principles of benevolence], they become misanthropes, for example, Rousseau.⁴⁵

For Kant, Rousseau exemplifies a benevolent misanthrope, and it is, to my mind, via Rousseau that a Crusoe is as a benevolent misanthrope.

5 *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and the Process of Civilization

As we have seen, the same episode acquires a different meaning depending on its context and interpretive perspectives. An Iroquois sachem ensnared by his appetite and incapable of judging the beauty of a palace is also a criticizer of the decadence of civilization; and a Crusoe on a desert island is a barbarian who is deprived of taste as well as a recluse who withdraws from a society that contradicts his idea of what society should be.

In section 2 of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* the Iroquois sachem and a Crusoe seem at first glance to be used as examples of individuals incapable of disinterested judgment of taste; as such, they become object of laughter or even pity. Yet, in another context and from the perspectives of the ascetic cynic and Rousseau as a criticizer of vanity, the Iroquois sachem and a Crusoe can be seen as criticizing luxury brought about by taste together with sociability. For Kant in section 2, the relationship between taste and sociability as seen through these examples “is not what is at issue here.”⁴⁶ This needs further clarification in the context of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

In section 9, Kant further considers the relationship between taste and sociability as follows:

That being able to communicate one's state of mind, even if only with regard to the faculties of cognition, carries a pleasure with it, could easily be established (empirically and psychologically) from the natural tendency of human beings to sociability. But that is not enough for our purposes.⁴⁷

45 Kant, *Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1775/1776 Friedländer*, AA 25, 530 (translation slightly modified). See also *Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1777/1778 Pillau*, AA 25: 846 and *Vorlesungen Wintersemester 1784/1785 Mrongovius [V-Anth/Mron]*, AA 25: 1364.

46 Kant, *KU*, AA 05: 205.

47 *Ibid.*, 218.

While admitting that sociability pertains *empirically* to taste, Kant excludes sociability from his main argument in the “Analytic of the beautiful” (§§ 1-22) where he examines solely a priori principles of taste. Subsequent to the “deduction” of aesthetic judgment (§§ 30-40), Kant resumes in section 41 his reflection on the “empirical interest in the beautiful,” which is excluded from the main argument of the “Analytic of the beautiful.” In this section, Kant discusses sociability in relation to the process of civilization by referring a second time to the Iroquois. Yet, toward the end, he adds that

... this interest, attached to the beautiful indirectly, through an inclination to society, and thus empirical, is of no importance for us here, for we must find that importance only in what may be related to the judgment of taste *a priori*.⁴⁸

Kant thus considers on three occasions the relationship between sociability and taste, and each time he dismisses it as being marginal. He addresses again the topic at the end of the first part of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, in section 60 entitled “Appendix. On the methodology of taste.” Kant notes, without going into detail, that “sociability” can be the “propaedeutic for all beautiful art.”⁴⁹ In fact, Kant never discusses this topic in detail throughout this first part, i.e., “Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment.” The reason is that sociability is empirical and does not concern a priori the judgment of taste. In other words, at this stage in the book, the process of civilization is considered to be an external matter.

We have to wait until section 83 in the second part of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* for this topic to be directly addressed. This section reflects on the meaning of culture:

There is no denying the preponderance of the evil showered upon us by the refinement of taste to the point of its idealization, and even by indulgence in the sciences as nourishment for vanity, because of the insatiable host of inclinations that are thereby aroused: however, there is also no mistaking nature’s end [*Zweck der Natur*] of prevailing ever more over the crudeness and vehemence of those inclinations, which belong more to our animality and are most opposed to our education for our higher vocation (the inclinations of enjoyment), and of making room for the development of humanity. Beautiful arts and sciences, which by

48 Ibid., 297-98.

49 Ibid., 355.

means of a universally communicable pleasure and an elegance and refinement [for society] make human beings, if not morally better [*sittlich besser*], at least better mannered [*gesittet*], very much reduce the tyranny of sensible tendencies, and prepare humans for a sovereignty in which reason alone shall have power; while the evil that is visited upon us partly by nature, partly by the intolerant selfishness of human beings, at the same time calls forth, strengthens, and steels the powers of the soul not to be subjected to those, and thus allows us to feel an aptitude for higher ends, which lies hidden in us.⁵⁰

The main argument is clear enough. Kant agrees with Rousseau that the sciences and the arts, including taste, have aroused various evils that nourish infelicitous inclinations and bring forth decadence or vanity. In this respect, Kant affirms that “Rousseau was not so wrong when he preferred to [the state of civilization] the [state] of savages.”⁵¹ This legitimates Kant’s (partially) positive view on the Iroquois and a Crusoe.⁵² This, however, is not his final position. Kant stresses that despite engendering various evils, the sciences and the arts are capable of making human beings sociable, “not morally better,” but “at least better mannered,” and, in this sense, preparing them for morality.⁵³ Even the evils produced by the sciences and the arts have the effect of strengthening the powers of our soul toward morality. To remain in the state of nature and turn one’s back on society to avoid such evils, therefore, results solely in removing oneself from morality.⁵⁴

50 Ibid., 433–34 (translation slightly modified).

51 Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, AA 08: 26 (translation slightly modified).

52 This concerns the second dimension of a Crusoe (see section “Transfiguration of Robinson”). Crusoe).

53 Kant argues the following in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*: “[I]deal taste has a tendency toward the external advancement of morality. – Making the human being *well-mannered* for his social situation to be sure does not mean as much as forming him into a *morally good* person, but nevertheless it prepares him for the latter by the effort he makes in his social situation to please others (to become liked or admired).” (Kant, *Anth*, AA 07: 244).

54 In this respect, the second dimension of a Crusoe is valid only to a limited extent and gives rise to the third, rather negative, dimension of a Crusoe. That is, a Crusoe and the savages are certainly free from social vanity; still, their attitude is anterior to morality, i.e., not based on it. If a Crusoe’s reclusion is based on morality, which does not apply to the savage, then Crusoe represents the fourth dimension. See also Kant, *V-Anth/Mron*, AA 25, 1417.

6 Concluding Remarks

Kant considers “nature’s end” of preparing morality via a whole history of human beings that seems at first glance only a mass of evils, regarding human history as a process of civilization.⁵⁵ This view of history is based on the “reflective power of judgment” whose principle is “purposiveness of nature” and pertains to the central issue of his philosophical system because the reflective power of judgment forms a bridge between nature and reason (or theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy).⁵⁶ In the first part of *Critique of the Power of Judgment* the relationship between taste and sociability, which is only empirical, is not a central theme. In section 83 of the second part, however, Kant explains the relationship between taste and sociability according to the principle of the reflective power of judgment, arguing that the role of taste in the process of civilization lies in preparing morality from within nature and, therefore, forming a bridge between nature and reason.

In the first part and section 83 of the second part of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the same reflective power of judgment presents different functions. Taste itself in the first part is a reflective power of judgment; the historical role of taste as a reflective power of judgment is explained in the second part by the idea of the purposiveness of nature as a principle of the reflective power of judgment. We can therefore conclude that, in section 83, Kant reconsiders from a meta-perspective the “critique of taste” as the central theme of the first part within his philosophical system,⁵⁷ offering thus a definitive and final answer to the question raised by the examples of the Iroquois sachem and a Crusoe on a desert island. These two episodes, which are left out from the main argument in the first part of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, are like a hinge that relates this very argument to his whole system of philosophy.

Biography

Tanehisa Otabe is Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Tokyo. His areas of interest cover eighteenth century German aesthetics as well as intercultural aesthetics. His publications in German include *Ästhetische Subjektivität. Romantik und Moderne* (Würzburg, 2005) and *Kulturelle Identität und Selbstbild. Aufklärung und Moderne in Japan und Deutschland* (Berlin, 2011). He also served as President of the Japanese Society for Aesthetics (2013-16).

55 Kant, *KU*, AA 05: 433.

56 Ibid., 179-80.

57 Ibid., 216.