Tradition and Orientation in Hermeneutics

RUDOLF A. MAKKREEL
Emory University

Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, according to Gadamer, marked a turning point in the history of aesthetics and the human sciences, but it had the unfortunate consequence of establishing a dichotomy between an epistemology that models all knowledge on the natural sciences and an aesthetics that is concerned with the mere satisfaction of subjective needs. This divorce is also ascribed to the hermeneutics developed by Schleiermacher, Boeckh, Droysen and Dilthey, and accounts for what Gadamer charges is its inability to confront basic questions about the truth of human existence.

Since these deficiencies of nineteenth-century hermeneutics are said to originate in the *Critique of Judgment*, I will first examine Kant's aesthetics in light of Gadamer's criticisms. Some of Gadamer's claims, I contend, are based on stereotypical interpretations of Kant's philosophy and overlook those aspects of it which either forestall or overcome his objections.

Kant's aesthetics is more relevant to the tasks of both epistemology and hermeneutics than has been recognized, and my main purpose is to explore ways in which certain Kantian themes may be developed as contributions to contemporary hermeneutics. In particular, I will attempt to show how Kant's aesthetics can lead to a theory of orientation as an important component of hermeneutics. While Gadamer emphasizes the authority of tradition, Kant's views on aesthetic ideas and the *sensus communis* suggest points of orientation that provide the basis for critical reflection on tradition.
In Truth and Method, Gadamer describes the adverse effects of the Critique of Judgment:

The radical subjectivization involved in Kant's new grounding of aesthetics was a completely new departure. In discrediting any kind of theoretical knowledge apart from that of natural science, it compelled the human sciences to rely on the methodology of the natural sciences in their self-understanding. But it made this reliance easier by offering as a subsidiary contribution the 'artistic element', 'feeling', and 'empathy'.

Dilthey's theory of the human sciences is also criticized for continuing to accept the authority of the natural sciences. "However much Dilthey might have defended the epistemological independence of the human sciences, what is called 'method' in modern science, remains everywhere the same and is seen only in an especially exemplary form in the natural sciences" (TM, 9).

For Gadamer, Kant's stress on subjective feeling makes his aesthetics an inadequate starting point for hermeneutic philosophy. Since the pure aesthetic judgment dispenses with concepts about the object, it is merely a judgment about the pleasure felt by the subject. This expresses the widely held view that the Critique of Judgment has no serious epistemological import. But Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment is part of a larger theory of reflective judgment that has implications for his overall conception of knowledge and scientific method. The principle of reflective judgment points to certain subjective needs of reason itself that underlie the determinant judgments of natural science established in the Critique of Pure Reason. The pure aesthetic judgment can serve as a transcendental reference point by which to orient other modes of reflective judgment—including teleological judgments about organisms in nature.

Kant's aesthetics was not developed in isolation from his epistemological concerns or from the basic transcendental conditions of knowledge established in the Critique of Pure Reason. To be sure, Kant did claim in the Critique of Judgment that pure aesthetic judgments do not use concepts. But too much has been made of this, for it proves upon analysis to mean only that they do not use empirical concepts. These judgments are never divorced from the categorial structure of the understanding. The same is true of the imagination, which is still oriented to the understanding in general and guided by reason. Although Gadamer