

“Straightening the Key to the Critique of Taste”

In §9 of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, Kant poses a question the answer to which is “the key to the critique of taste, hence worthy of full attention.” This declaration has consumed the full attention of many resourceful readers, yet there’s no consensus as to which answer Kant intends to endorse, let alone how that answer, properly understood, serves to unlock the mysteries of taste. On the account I defend, Kant argues that I can have a disinterested pleasure only by successfully setting out to have a pleasure the likes of which I can properly require of my fellow spectators. When it comes to pleasures, a cultivated impersonality is the price of detachment, the price of freedom. This helps us to understand the function of taste and its cultivation in a broader economy of human needs and satisfactions. It enables us to regard the claim I make on the pleasures of others when I call a thing beautiful, a claim I autonomously base on my own felt pleasure alone, as one that others can and should acknowledge, can and should take into account, without compromising their own autonomy in the process.