

Kant's Notion of Judgment from the Perspective of the Theory of Tacit Knowing

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ABSTRACT Key Words: universal-particular distinction, judgment, tacit knowing, Kant, Polanyi
The dominant view of the Western intellectual tradition, or perhaps more accurately, the continental European tradition, emphasizes the primacy of the universal over the particular when it comes to understanding the nature of knowledge. This preoccupation with the universal is undermined by the theory of tacit knowing which underlines the mediation of the universal and the particular with an emphasis on the latter, that is, the particular. An analysis of Kant's notions of determinative and reflective judgment reveals that he grounds each in tacit processes, privileging the role of particular examples or exemplars. Structural similarities between Kant's judgments of taste and Polanyi's notion of personal knowledge illuminates Polanyi's surprising claim that "The very nature of knowledge is in the Third Critique, not in the First Critique."

1. Introduction

Michael Polanyi popularized the notion of tacit knowing and contributes much to its elaboration. In the contemporary discussion, traditions associated with Wittgenstein's thought, phenomenology, and hermeneutics have also contributed to a still loosely-formulated notion of tacit knowing. When the various notions of tacit knowing are examined jointly, they cover such contrasts as the articulated and the unarticulated; the articulatable and the unarticulatable; the focal and the subsidiary; the foreground and the background; the critical, the uncritical and the a-critical; the particular and the universal; the detached and the involved; the representational and the pragmatic, etc. The potential of the notion of tacit knowing will be fully displayed only when some future analysis of these conceptual relations engages all relevant philosophical traditions.

In this article, I will concentrate on the universal-particular relation involved in tacit knowing. Polanyi touches upon this conceptual relation in the following two statements:

An art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice (*PK* 53).

What has been said of skills applies equally to connoisseurship. . . Connoisseurship, like skill, can be communicated only by example, not by precept (*PK* 54).

The acquisition or transference of skill and connoisseurship leans on examples rather than rules, prescriptions or precepts. A prescription or a precept is something universal and an example is a particular. According to Polanyi, skill and connoisseurship are two paradigm cases of tacit knowing. Evidently, there is a universal-particular dimension in Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing.

The dominant view in the Western intellectual tradition, or perhaps more accurately, the continental European tradition, emphasizes the learning of rules, precepts, and prescriptions which are universal concepts

embedded in explicit knowing. It claims the primacy of the universal over the particular when it comes to understanding the nature of knowledge. Wittgenstein describes it as “the craving for generality” and “the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case”¹ This preoccupation with the universal in continental European intellectual tradition is one of the targets of attack of the theory of tacit knowledge. With respect to the universal-particular relation, the theory of tacit knowing underlines the mediation of the universal and the particular with an emphasis on the latter.

Polanyi alludes to the universal-particular relation in his theory of tacit knowing; however, the theme is not fully explored in his writings. In this connection, we have a lot to learn from Aristotle’s discussion on *phronesis* and Kant’s analysis of judgment. I have elsewhere examined Aristotle’s notion of *phronesis* from the perspective of the theory of tacit knowing.² The focus of this article is on Kant’s notion of judgment. It is not difficult to see that there is a judgmental component in the exercise of skill and connoisseurship. I will examine Kant’s notion of judgment to see to what degree it will help us understand the role of tacit processes in learning with an emphasis on the universal-particular relation.

The connection between Kant’s conception of judgment and tacit knowing was first pointed out by Michael Polanyi (*KB* 105), and this point was later reinforced by others, for instance, Kjell S. Johannessen, a Norwegian Wittgensteinian.³ However, to my knowledge, a detailed exposition of Kant’s conception of judgment from the perspective of the theory of tacit knowing has not yet been attempted, and this is what I want to pursue in this article.

The term “judgment” usually has two meanings: first, the power or the faculty of judgment, and second, the result of the exercise of this power, that is, the product of various judgments about things we are concerned about. These two meanings are inseparable, but my focus here is on the first.

Theoretically, there can be two ways to achieve the mediation between the universal and the particular. One starts from the universal and the other starts from the particular. Correspondingly, according to Kant, there are two types of judgment, the determinative and the reflective. “Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is determinative. But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely reflective.”⁴ In this paper, I will examine determinative judgment and reflective judgment respectively from the perspective of the theory of tacit knowledge. Then I will respond to two relevant questions involved in such an attempt.

2. Determinative Judgment

According to Kant, judgment is one of man’s higher cognitive powers; the other two are understanding and reason. Kant characterizes understanding as our power of rules, and judgment the power of subsuming particulars under the universal rules. “If understanding in general is to be viewed as the faculty of rules, judgment will be the faculty of subsuming under rules; that is, of distinguishing whether something does or does not stand under a given rule (*casus datae legis*).”⁵ Obviously, the judgmental power Kant talks about here is determinative. “Determinative judgment, [which operates] under universal transcendental laws given by the understanding, is only subsumptive” (*CJ* 19). Given the rules provided by understanding, when confronted with a particular case, it is up to judgment to decide whether or not it can be subsumed under a certain rule.

We have two different ways of describing what happens in a determinative judgment. If we take the direction from the particular case to the given general rule, what we do in a determinative judgment is *subsumption*, but if we take the other way round, that is, move from the given general rule to the particular case, then what we do is *application*. Subsumption and application are two sides of the same coin.

From the perspective of the theory of tacit knowledge, the first point that merits attention in Kant's analysis of determinative judgment is the argument that there is no rule for application or subsumption in determinative judgment.

General logic contains, and can contain, no rules for judgment. . . . If it sought to give general instructions how we are to subsume under these rules, that is, to distinguish whether something does or does not come under them, that could only be by means of another rule. This in turn, for the very reason that it is a rule, again demands guidance from judgment. (*CPR* 177)

If we try to set a rule for subsumption or application as general logic does — since it abstracts from all content of cognition, all it can provide is formal rules — then this new rule has the same subsumption or application problem. In order to solve this problem, general logic will once again resort to a third rule, and thus we end up with a n infinite regress. That is to say, the application of a rule or the subsumption of particular cases under a rule is ruleless. Kant reaches this point in his First *Critique* by appealing to *ad infinitum* arguments. It is not explicitly stated in the above passage, though it is definitely implied in it.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that this *ad infinitum* argument is once again employed by the late Wittgenstein in his discussion of rule-following activity. K. J. Johannessen points out that one of the most significant points of late Wittgenstein is that

a definition or the expression of a rule cannot itself determine how it is to be applied, as it can be interpreted in various ways. From this it follows that there can be no point in formulating a new rule that lays down how the first is to be applied. For then the same problem will arise once more in connection with the expression of the new rule. It, again, can be taken or understood in various ways. And thus it will go on *ad infinitum* if we try to escape from this tangle by this route. This is, in other words, a dead end. At one stage there thus have to be cases of rule-application which are not determined by other rules. *The application of rules is accordingly in principle ruleless.*⁶ (italics mine)

The application of a rule of language is ruleless. It is up to our intransitive understanding and judgmental power to tell us how to apply a rule.

From a different approach, Michael Polanyi arrives at a similar conclusion in his discussion of personal judgment in scientific research. Polanyi holds that there are two kinds of rules, i.e., strict rules and vague rules. Strict rules, like rules of multiplication, are rules which leave no room for interpretation in their application, while vague rules, like rules of art, always leave a considerable margin for personal judgment on the part of those who apply the rules under particular circumstances. Science does involve strict rules, like the manuals on the methods of experiment, measurement, calculation, map-making, etc., but that part only constitutes the routine work of science. For the original part of science, i.e., scientific research (most importantly, discovery and verification or falsification) in the strict sense, there are no manuals. Only vague rules are involved.

“Admittedly, there are rules which give valuable guidance to scientific discovery, but they are merely rules of art” (SFS 14). Then a question arises: how do we apply those vague rules in scientific research?

How can we ever interpret a rule? By another rule? There can be only a finite number of tiers of rules so that such a regression would soon be exhausted. Let us assume then that all existing rules were united into one single code. Such a code of rules could obviously not contain prescriptions for its own reinterpretation (SFS 58).

In scientific research, we cannot interpret a rule in its application by referring to another rule. Interestingly enough, in contrast to Kant and Wittgenstein who appeal to *ad infinitum* arguments, Polanyi reaches the point that the application of rules is ruleless by appealing to the finitude of the existing rules. This is where the personal judgment of the scientist sets in: “The application of rules must always rely ultimately on acts not determined by rule. . . . The rules of scientific enquiry leave their own application wide open, to be decided by the scientist’s judgment” (SFS 14-15).

The point that the application of a rule or the subsumption of particular cases under a rule is ruleless, and thus requires judgment, indicates that the power of judgment is something that is irreducible to a set of formal rules. It is something ultimate in our mind. Kant takes it as a natural gift and holds that the lack of it is stupidity. “It appears that, though understanding is capable of being instructed, and of being equipped with rules, judgment is a peculiar talent which can be practiced only, and cannot be taught. It is the specific quality of so-called mother-wit; and its lack no school can make good” (CPR 177). “Deficiency in judgment is just what is ordinarily called stupidity, for such a failing there is no remedy” (CPR 178). Learning and intelligence are two different things. It is not unusual that a learned man may betray his original deficit in judgment in the application of his scientific knowledge. Kant maintains that a physician, a judge, or a statesman may have a good understanding of the pathological, juridical or political rules *in abstracto*. However, due to the lack of the natural power of judgment, this person can easily blunder in applying them to cases *in concreto*, or in distinguishing whether or not certain particular cases can be subsumed under them.

Polanyi sees in Kant’s analysis of judgment a wonderful illustration of his theory of personal, tacit knowledge. He says that

even a writer like Kant, so powerfully bent on strictly determining the rules of pure reason, occasionally admitted that into all acts of judgment there enters, and must enter, a personal decision which cannot be accounted for by any rules. Kant says that no system of rules can prescribe the procedure by which rules themselves are to be applied. There is an ultimate agency which, unfettered by any explicit rules, decides on the subsumption of a particular instance under any general rule or a general concept. And of this agency Kant says only that it ‘is what constitutes our so-called mother-wit.’ (KB 105)

The ultimate agency involved in exercise of our judgmental power, which Kant calls our mother-wit, is in Polanyi’s terminology, our personal, tacit powers. Also, according to Johannessen, Wittgenstein’s intransitive understanding as a form of tacit knowledge is similar to Kant’s judgment.

This intransitive understanding expressed in the proper performance of the established practices of a language-society might thus, not inappropriately, be looked upon as a sort of

tacit knowledge, . . . In many respects this tacit knowledge element embedded in our conceptual competence is similar to what Kant pointed out and called a talent, the gift of being able to reach a reasonable decision in cases of subsumption. The traditional name for it is, of course, judgment.⁷

Though the lack of judgment cannot be remedied by learning rules, it can be improved with examples. Examples function very differently in their relation to understanding and judgment. While they are normally negative to the former, they are conducive to the latter. There is a logical gap between examples and the rules of understanding. Examples are particulars, while the rules of understanding are strictly universal. As the particular cases of a certain rule, examples can hardly adequately fulfill the conditions of the rule. They often weaken understanding's effort to grasp the rule universally and independently of the particular circumstances of experience. So, if we stick to examples, "the precision and correctness" of the insight of understanding, which aims at strict universality, will inevitably be impaired. To put it in another way, if we want to accomplish strict universality, we must not be example-bound. But the situation is quite different for judgment, which, as "the ability to think the particular" as contained in the universal, in its effort to mediate between the universal and the particular, has to put more emphasis on the particular. That is the reason which lies behind Kant's following remark: "Examples are thus the go-cart of judgment; and those who are lacking in the natural talent can never dispense with them" (*CPR* 178). For those who lack the natural talent of judgment, their power of judgment can be sharpened through examples and actual tasks. Kant considers it the "great benefit" of examples.

3. Reflective Judgment

According to Kant's definition, when we are only confronted with the particular, and have to find the universal for it, the power that we exercise under such circumstances is reflective judgment. Before Kant, Baumgarten touched upon this form of judgment in aesthetics. A judgment of taste is a typical reflective judgment. According to Kant, taste is our ability to judge the beautiful. "In their logical quantity all judgments of taste are singular judgments" (*CJ* 59). A typical judgment of taste is, "The tulip is beautiful." This judgment and the judgment, "The tulip is agreeable (for example, in its smell)," are quite different. "To say, 'This flower is beautiful,' is tantamount to a mere repetition of the flower's own claim to be to everyone's liking. The agreeableness of its smell, on the other hand, gives it no claim whatever: its smell delights one person, it makes another dizzy" (*CJ* 145). A judgment of the agreeable is based upon a private feeling which is only valid for the person who likes the object, while a judgment of taste requires everyone to like the object and lays claim to universal validity. In line with this distinction, Kant distinguishes two kinds of taste, i.e., taste of sense and taste of reflection. "Insofar as judgments about the agreeable are merely private, whereas judgment about the beautiful are put forward as having general validity (as being public), taste regarding the agreeable can be called taste of sense, and taste regarding the beautiful can be called taste of reflection." For the agreeable, we can say that everyone has his own taste (of sense), while for the beautiful, we cannot say so, since universality is definitive of the taste of reflection. When Kant talks about a judgment of taste as a reflective judgment, he means the latter, i.e., taste of reflection. Thus, we can see clearly that a judgment of taste starts from a certain particular, for instance, a singular given rose, but when the judgment is made that this rose is beautiful, a universal claim is included in the judgment. It has the typical structure of a reflective judgment. In contrast, the lack of universal validity makes a judgment of the agreeable only a judgment of sensation, not a judgment of reflection.

The universality of a judgment of taste implies its necessity. The beautiful is not only an object that is liked by everyone, but also something that cannot be not liked. If I declare that "The tulip is beautiful," then

I assume that everyone *ought* to give his assent to my judgment, not just that everybody *will* agree with me. A judgment of taste contains an ought. If somebody judges differently, I will blame him and deny that he has taste. A judgment of taste exhibits necessity. “About any presentation I can say at least that there is a *possibility* for it (as a cognition) to be connected with a pleasure. About that which I call agreeable I say that it *actually* gives rise to pleasure in me. But we think of the beautiful as having a *necessary* reference to liking” (CJ 85). The beautiful is the object of a necessary liking.

The universality and necessity of taste prompts Kant to identify taste as a kind of *sensus communis*. *Sensus communis* has two different meanings. In one sense, it is what we normally call “common sense,” where the term “common” means nothing but “vulgar.” Common sense means something that can be found everywhere and the possession of which deserves no merit or superiority. Of course, this is not what Kant means when he claims that taste is a kind of *sensus communis*. Rather, he takes “*sensus communis* to mean the idea of a sense shared [by all of us], i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else’s way of presenting [something], in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones, an illusion that would have a prejudicial influence on the judgment” (CJ 160). *Sensus communis* in this sense requires one to transcend the private subjective conditions of his judgment and puts himself into the positions of everyone else, and thus arrives at a universal standpoint to reflect on his own judgment. Kant maintains that taste, as the ability to judge the beautiful with universal validity and necessity, can be legitimately called a *sensus communis*. In this context, Kant defines taste “as the ability to judge something that makes our feelings in a given presentation *universally communicable* without mediation by a concept” (CJ 162).

The expression “without mediation by a concept” in the above definition indicates another important feature of a judgment of taste, that is, it is not based upon concepts. This point can be shown clearly by contrasting the judgment of taste “This tulip is beautiful” with “This tulip is red” and “This tulip is good.” While the judgment of taste is aesthetical, the latter two are cognitive, either theoretically or practically. In the judgment “The tulip is red”, the predicate “red” is a concept which denotes a property of the tulip, by means of which the tulip, as an object of cognition, is determined. In the judgment “The tulip is beautiful,” “beautiful” also sounds like a property of the tulip. But in fact it is not. Beauty is not a property of the tulip, and “apart from a reference to the subject’s feelings, beauty is nothing by itself” (CJ 63). It is not a concept that determines the tulip. The judgment “The tulip is good” is also based upon a determinate concept, though a practical one. “Good is what, by means of reason, we like through its mere concept. . . . In order to consider something good, I must always know what sort of thing the object is [meant] to be, i.e., I must have a [determinate] concept of it” (CJ 48). Good always involves a concept of a purpose of the object, and consequently a relation between reason and volition, which is not the case at all with a judgment of the beautiful. In a word, a judgment of taste, according to Kant, “is not directed to concepts, for a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment (whether theoretical or practical) and hence is neither *based* on concepts, nor directed to them as *purposes*” (CJ 51).

A concept is, in essence, a rule. The fact a judgment of taste is not based upon a determinative concept implies that there is no rule for taste. “There can be no objective rule of taste, no rule of taste that determines by concepts what is beautiful. . . . If we search for a principle of taste that states the universal criterion of the beautiful by means of determinate concepts, then we are engaging in a fruitless endeavor, because we search for something that is impossible and intrinsically contradictory” (CJ 79). That’s why no one, by referring to a rule, can compel us to acknowledge something to be beautiful. No one, by means of any bases of proof, can

talk us into a judgment that something is beautiful. It is up to us, in the presentation of the object, to judge, by reflecting on our feelings of pleasure or displeasure, whether it is beautiful or not.

It's interesting to note here the parallel between determinative judgment and reflective judgment. We have seen that determinative judgment, as the power of subsuming the particulars under a universal (a general rule, a concept), or the ability to apply the universal to the particulars, is ruleless. Now we find that a judgment of taste is also ruleless. The difference lies in the fact that, in determinative judgment, we do have concepts, general rules. It is the application of these concepts, general rules, that is ruleless, while in a judgment of taste, we have no determinative concepts, no general rules at all; only the particular is given. In each case, tacit skills must be employed.

As mentioned above, Kant, in his discussion of determinative judgment, emphasizes that judgment is a natural talent and touches briefly on the importance of examples in sharpening our power of judgment. With regard to taste, he also raises the question of whether it is an original and natural ability, or an ability to be acquired and therefore artificial in its origins (*CJ 90*), but he does not tackle the issue head on. However, it is not hard to see that his emphasis is on the latter, where examples play an important role in the improvement of our taste. Kant says,

Among all our abilities and talents, taste is precisely what stands most in need of examples regarding what has enjoyed the longest-lasting approval in the course of cultural progress, in order that it will not become uncouth again and relapse into the crudeness of its first attempts; and taste needs this because its judgment cannot be determined by concepts and precepts (*CJ 147*).

In this quotation, two points merit attention. Firstly, Kant makes it crystal clear that taste is not identical with the crude predisposition given by nature. It should be refined and sharpened by those exemplary products of taste that have been recognized by generations after generations, like the works of the classical authors. "We extol, and rightly so, the works of the ancients as models, and call their authors classical, as if they form a certain noble class among writers which gives laws to people by the precedent it sets" (*CJ 146*).

Secondly, the reason that we have to resort to examples, models, archetypes so as to sharpen our taste is that we have no general rules to follow in judging what is beautiful, because it is not based upon determinant concepts. Kant generalizes this point and holds that it applies to a lesser degree to other areas like religion and mathematics. In religion, "an example of virtue and holiness will always accomplish more than any universal precepts we have received from priests or philosophers" (*CJ 146*). In mathematics, the ancient mathematicians are still regarded as "indispensable models."

The fact that there is no rule based on determinate concepts for a judgment of taste gives its universal validity and necessity a special character. Kant says, "Hence the common sense, of whose judgment I am at this point offering my judgment of taste as an example, attributing to it *exemplary* validity on that account, is a mere ideal standard. With this standard presupposed, we could rightly turn a judgment that agreed with it, as well as the liking that is expressed in it for some object, into a rule for everyone" (*CJ 89*). We have seen that a judgment of taste has a universality that is not based upon concepts. Thus, it is not general rules based upon concepts that are universally valid for all those who make judgment about the beautiful, but a particular judgment of taste which is an example of *sensus communis* that is valid for all the judging subjects, and has the right to demand

universal assent from all the judging subjects. As an example, this judgment of taste is a particular in itself, but it has the universal validity that a general rule normally has. Thus, Kant is well justified to call it “exemplary validity.” Similarly, Kant calls the necessity of a judgment of taste “exemplary necessity”:

As a necessity that is thought in an aesthetic judgment, it can only be called *exemplary*, i.e., a necessity of the assent of everyone to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state (*CJ* 85).

The necessity of a judgment of taste cannot be derived from determinate concepts, whether theoretical or practical, therefore, it cannot be apodictic, an attribute that we usually attach to a general rule. It is the necessity of everyone’s assent to a particular judgment of taste taken as an example. In a word, it is the example, the particular, rather than the concept, the general rule, which has universal validity and necessity in a judgment of taste.

The respect for exemplary products of taste does not turn us into passive imitators. Kant claims that taste is something autonomous; it must be the ability one has by oneself. It cannot be acquired by imitating somebody else’s taste. Imitation is basing one’s judgment on other people’s judgments, hence not autonomy but heteronomy. Then what is the right attitude towards the examples, models, archetypes of the classical authors that we admire so much? Kant puts it as follows: “*Following* by reference to a precedent, rather than imitating, is the right term for any influence that products of an exemplary author may have on others; and this means no more than drawing on the same sources from which the predecessor himself drew, and learning from him how to go about doing so” (*CJ* 146-147). That is to say, following rather than passively imitating a precedent of an exemplary author is the way that one develops his taste to the point that he can demonstrate it in his judgment of what is beautiful as well as his predecessor.

The way that people sharpen their taste by following the exemplary products of classical authors is similar in structure to the way geniuses in fine art transmit their ideas and skills to their pupils. Genius is different from taste. Taste is the ability to judge the beautiful; genius is the ability to produce beautiful objects in fine arts. While taste results from practice in following models of classical authors, genius is an innate productive ability of the artist given by nature at birth. “Genius is a *talent* for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition consisting of a skill for something that can be learned by following some rule or other; hence the foremost property of genius must be *originality*” (*CJ* 75; italics in original). Genius is the talent of producing something original in fine arts that cannot be imitated or learned by rules. Kant says,

Whenever we convey our thoughts, there are two ways of arranging them, one of these is called manner (*modus aetheticus*), the other method (*modus logicus*); the difference between these two is that the first has no standard other than the feeling that there is unity in the exhibition [of the thoughts], whereas the second follows in [all of] this determinate principles; hence only the first applies to fine art (*CJ* 187).

Since in fine art, there is only manner and no method, “the master must show *by his example* what the student is to produce and how” (*CJ* 230; italics mine). It is true that sometimes artists will describe the procedure of fine art under general rules and precepts, but Kant reminds us that they are abstracted from the products of the artist, and “are more likely to be useful to the students as occasional reminders of what the main features of that procedure are, than as prescriptions of these features” (*CJ* 230-231). That is to say, if there are any rules or precepts in fine art, they are parasitic on examples, the particular products of artists. In fine arts, examples are

prior to rules and precepts. The rules and precepts are useful only as ancillaries for pedagogical purposes. It is the examples or models of one genius that arouse another genius's feeling of originality. That's why Kant entitles the originality of genius as "exemplary originality," which means the products of a genius serve as models to be followed by those who are endowed with genius by nature.

4. Concluding Remarks

Having outlined the main features of determinative and reflective judgment from the perspective of the theory of tacit knowing, I will conclude by addressing the following two questions that might naturally arise about such an attempt. 1) How should one assess the epistemological significance of Kant's third *Critique*, especially its analysis of aesthetic judgment? 2) How should one interpret the challenge to the traditional conception of knowledge posed by Kant's notion of judgment?

We can reformulate the first question as follows: Does something like taste in aesthetic experience have universal epistemological significance? Is Kant's analysis of judgments of taste, which are non-cognitive in nature, relevant to empirical cognition?

The theory of tacit knowing would give a positive response to this question. Kant does not explicitly draw such a conclusion; but this is hinted at in his text. As mentioned above, Kant holds that the principle of the primacy of example in the improvement of taste also applies to areas like religion and mathematics. Hannah Arendt is fascinated by Kant's analysis of judgments of taste. She argues that this type of reflective judgment takes seriously particularity as such. She seeks to pursue this mode of thinking in dealing with political and historical issues. As Richard Bernstein puts it,

Whether she turned her attention to the study of totalitarianism, or the Eichmann trial, or even to politics itself, she sought to understand and judge phenomena in their particularity and to resist the temptation to misjudge them by relying on concepts, universals, categories that failed to do justice to their distinctiveness and uniqueness. All of her thinking consists in the exercise of discernment and discrimination that are characteristic of taste and judgment.⁸

Taste is also regarded as an important quality of a scientist. Nobel laureate, Professor Yang Zhenning, once remarked that having taste or lack of taste has a decisive impact on the professional life of a physicist.⁹ Michael Polanyi likes to talk in a more general sense about connoisseurship embodied in various branches of science, technology and different professions (*PK* 54-55). In short, the question of taste is not confined to aesthetics. In all areas ranging from mathematics and natural sciences to politics and religion, we are confronted with the question of taste, connoisseurship and judgment. The theory of tacit knowledge takes seriously these issues and thematizes taste, connoisseurship and judgment as a group of epistemological concepts with universal significance.

We can interpret the epistemological significance of the third *Critique* in another way. Gabriella Ujlaki reports that in one of his letters to Marjorie Grene, Polanyi claims that "the very nature of knowledge is in the Third *Critique* not in the First *Critique*," and that "all comprehension is informal and personal: this is the real theme of the Third *Critique*."¹⁰ How should one give substance to this rather general comment? This is my understanding: the key to this enigmatic comment lies in the structural similarity between Polanyi's concept of personal knowledge and Kant's notion of reflective judgment, even though Polanyi does not mention judgment at all here.

As far as the problem of knowledge is concerned, it is widely held that we should pay more attention to the First *Critique*, where Kant systematically elaborates his theory of knowledge, than the Third *Critique*, which is normally considered as describing his thoughts on aesthetics. Polanyi surprises us and argues for the opposite: if one intends to understand the nature of knowledge, one should consult the Third *Critique* rather than the First *Critique*. Understandably for a philosopher who emphasizes the role played by the personal coefficients and tacit powers in the shaping and holding of knowledge, the First *Critique* which is “bent on strictly determining the rules of pure reason” is off the mark in its investigation of the problem of human knowledge. But what about the Third *Critique*? In what way does the Third *Critique* shed light on the nature of knowledge? Polanyi’s characterization of the theme of the Third *Critique* offers us a clue to the unraveling of the riddle. He sees in the Third *Critique* a preview of his theory of personal knowledge. To Polanyi, the ideal of scientific detachment, which took shape in the scientific revolution in the 17th century, is a delusion. Polanyi’s attacks it ruthlessly all his life. The substitute that he proposes for the false ideal of scientific detachment is personal knowledge with a tacit dimension. In his view, the personal participation of the knower in the shaping and holding of knowledge is neither a mere imperfection that should be eliminated, nor a mere psychological by-product of objective truth, but a logically indispensable element to science. However, acknowledging the indispensability of personal participation in all acts of knowing does not make knowledge subjective. While endorsing the importance of personal involvement, Polanyi draws a clear demarcation between the personal and the subjective. According to Polanyi, what is subjective is defined as being private, whereas personal participation “is a responsible act claiming universal validity” (*PK* [1958 version], vii). Personal knowledge claims not only universal validity, but also necessity in Kant’s sense. The freedom of the subjective person is to do as he pleases, while the freedom of the responsible person is to act as he must (*PK* 309). It is not hard to see that Polanyi’s conception of personal knowledge is analogous to Kant’s judgment of taste. When I claim to know something, my knowledge claim is not subjective, private, and idiosyncratic. As a responsible knower, I claim it with universal intent and cannot do otherwise. Something similar in structure happens when I make a judgment that “The tulip is beautiful,” which means not only I like the tulip, but also that this sort of liking is universally valid and necessary. In Polanyi’s terminology, a judgment of taste can be regarded as a fusion of the personal and the universal, something that is characteristic of personal knowledge. This is how I interpret Polanyi’s statement “all comprehension is informal and personal: this is the real theme of the Third *Critique*.” Of course, it is not difficult to see that there are great differences between personal knowledge and judgments of taste; for instance, personal knowledge is cognitive, while a judgment of taste is aesthetic; personal knowledge involves a concept of reality which is quite different from Kant’s notion of thing-in-itself, etc. To sum up, it might not be fair to say that the nature of knowledge does not lie in the First *Critique*, but it certainly requires flare and insight to see it in the Third *Critique*.

Now let’s turn to the second question. At the outset of this article, I point out that “the craving for generality” and “the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case” have had a great impact on the understanding of knowledge in the continental European tradition. The theory of tacit knowing calls into question this preconceived understanding of knowledge. It emphasizes the mediation between the universal and the particular, with an emphasis on the latter, that is, the particular. In this respect, Aristotle’s discussion of *phronesis* and Kant’s analysis of judgment are two important sources of inspiration for the theory of tacit knowing.

According to Aristotle, theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) aims at universal and necessary truth, while in practical life, humans need not only to know the general principles, rules and norms, but also to know how to apply them in particular situations. *Phronesis* is required in this process. “Nor is practical wisdom concerned with universals only — it must also recognize the particulars, for it is practical, and practice is concerned with particulars. . . . Now practical wisdom is concerned with action; therefore one should have both forms of it, or the latter in preference to the former.”¹¹ This is Aristotle’s characterization of *phronesis* in terms of the relationship between the universal and the particular.

Aristotle points to the mediation of the universal and the particular in practical (i.e., ethical and political) realms. Kant goes a step further in this direction. He makes clear that the mediation might take different forms. Determinative judgment and reflective judgment approach the mediation in different ways, and thus concretize the Aristotelian thesis of mediation. Aristotle holds that, in *phronesis*, the particular is preferred to the universal. Kant’s reflections imply that, negatively speaking, judgments of taste (tacit knowing) cannot be improved by getting familiar with general rules, principles and precepts, etc. In determinative judgment, the general rule is given; however, the application of the general rule or the subsumption of the particular cases under the general rule is ruleless. In merely reflective judgment, like a judgement of taste, no concept, no general rule is given. Taste is the ability of knowing how to judge the beautiful, while genius is the ability of knowing how to create the beautiful. But neither taste nor genius has any general rule to follow. They rely on tacit skills.

Positively speaking, Kant claims that the faculty of judgment can be sharpened with examples. For determinative judgment, examples are its go-cart. In aesthetic experience, taste is to be refined and enhanced by the exemplary products of the classical authors. Likewise, the tacit knowledge of a genius can only be fully displayed by his examples to his followers. In this vein, Kant talks about the exemplary validity and the exemplary necessity of a judgment of taste and the exemplary originality of genius. The word example comes from *eximere*, meaning “to single out some particular.”¹² The emphasis on examples indicates that in its attempt to mediate the universal and the particular, judgment puts its weight on the particular. This is absolutely in the spirit of *phronesis*. In addition, with his distinction between determinative judgment and reflective judgment, and with the distinction between taste and genius, and based upon that, with his discussions of the exemplary validity and exemplary necessity of judgment of taste and the exemplary originality of genius, Kant’s understanding of the thesis of the primacy of examples is more sophisticated than that of Aristotle.

In sum, so far as the goal of challenging “the craving for the general” and “the contemptuous attitude towards the particular cases” of traditional conceptions of knowledge is concerned, the theory of tacit knowing, in my view, can learn something important from Aristotle’s discussion on *phronesis* and Kant’s analysis of judgment. In this orientation, Kant inherits Aristotle’s basic thesis, and no doubt deepens and concretizes it. Moreover, the insights of both Aristotle and Kant help flesh out Polanyi’s notion of tacit knowledge.

Notes

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd ed. (London: Basil Blackwell, 1969), p. 18.

² YU Zhenhua, “*Phronesis* in the Perspective of the Theory of Tacit Knowledge,” *Academic Monthly* 12, 2003.

³ Cf. Kyell S. Johannessen, “Rule Following, Intransitive Understanding, and Tacit Knowledge – An Investigation of the Wittgensteinian Concept of Practice as Regards Tacit Knowing,” in *Essays in Pragmatic Philosophy II* (Norwegian University Press, 1990).

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 18. Hereafter cited in the text as *CJ*.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), p. 177. Hereafter cited in the text as *CPR*.

⁶ Johannessen, op cit, 122.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

⁸ Richard Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles – Essays in a Pragmatic Mode* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p. 236.

⁹ Yang Zhenning, *Essays by Yang Zhenning* (East China Normal University), pp. 406-409.

¹⁰ Gabriella Ujlaki (“The ‘Tacit’ and the ‘Personal’: An Aesthetical Approach to the Nature of Knowledge,” *Polanyiana* 1-2 (1992), 127) quotes a letter from Polanyi to Marjorie Grene dated October 13, 1959.

¹¹ Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 1028-1029.

¹² Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. by Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 66.

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