

Kant on the Possibility of Ugliness

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As it is presented in some of the literature, Kant's account of aesthetic judgement precludes him from accounting for the possibility of ugliness. For instance, in 'Why Kant Finds Nothing Ugly', Shier argues that 'within Kant's aesthetics, there cannot be any negative judgments of taste.'¹ And in 'Kant's Problem with Ugliness', Thomson claims that 'Kant's aesthetic theory precludes ... ugliness'.² A number of reasons have been put forward to explain why there can be no ugliness for Kant. Some have to do with his account of experience in general; others with his definition of beauty as free play between imagination and understanding. Of course, the real source of the problem is that the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* does not actually discuss ugliness, so commentators are left with the task of filling in the gaps.³

Starting from the premise that ugliness should be defined as the contrary of beauty, I will argue that Kant's account of aesthetic judgement commits him not only to the existence of the ugly, but to the distinction between two kinds of ugliness.⁴ To support this claim, I will show that beauty as he defines it can be negated in two ways, one that gives rise to impure ugliness and the other to pure ugliness.⁵ I will examine them in turn, first by showing that impure ugliness is the contrary of beauty insofar as it contravenes our interests and produces a desire to dispose of it, whereas beauty is necessarily disinterested for Kant. I will then use Kant's account of pure beauty to carve a space for pure ugliness: it will present all the characteristics that make it 'pure' while replacing the characteristics that make it beautiful with the ones that make it ugly.

1 D. Shier, 'Why Kant Finds Nothing Ugly', *BJA* 38 (1998), 412–18, at 413.

2 G. Thomson, 'Kant's Problem with Ugliness', *JAAC* 50 (1992), 107–15, at 107.

3 The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* only mentions ugliness once (*CJ*, 190 (5:312)). Insofar as the following works by Kant are cited frequently, I have identified them by these abbreviations: *A*, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, in *Anthropology, History and Education*, ed. Robert B. Loudon and Günter Zöllner (Cambridge: CUP, 2007); *CPR*, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999); *CJ*, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: CUP, 2000); *LA*, *Lectures on Anthropology*, ed. Robert B. Loudon and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: CUP, 2012). I have included a citation to the English translation, followed by a citation to the German text of the Prussian Academy edition (volume and page reference) in parentheses.

4 Kant often hints at the distinction between beauty and ugliness in various notes. For instance, 'Ugliness is thus something positive, not merely lack of beauty, but the existence of something *opposite* to beauty' (my emphasis, *Lecture on Logic Philippi* (24:364), translated by C. Wenzel in 'Kant Finds Nothing Ugly?', *BJA* 39 (1999), 416–22, at 418). Defining ugliness as the contrary of beauty entails that there is a threefold distinction between the beautiful, the ugly, and the aesthetically indifferent. It can be contrasted with the claim that ugliness is contradictory to beauty, which entails that anything that is not beautiful is necessarily ugly. See A. Cohen, 'Kant's Categories of Ugliness', in *Akten des XI. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses* (Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming) for an account of the various ways of defining ugliness by contrasting it with beauty.

5 Interestingly enough, the only passage of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that does mention ugliness clearly implies that there are different kinds of ugliness: 'only one kind of ugliness cannot be represented in a way adequate to nature' (*CJ*, 190 (5:312)).

A Case for Impure Ugliness

Kant defines the essential features of judgements of beauty by contrasting them with two other types of judgements of taste. Some judgements are grounded on the sensory appeal of the object and in particular the feeling of the agreeable: ‘one says of the agreeable not merely that it *pleases* but that it *gratifies*. It is not mere approval that I give it, rather inclination is thereby aroused.’⁶ Others are grounded on the fact that the object is useful for some purpose or other and thus involves ‘the concept of an end, hence the relation of reason to (at least possible) willing, and consequently a satisfaction in the *existence* of an object or of an action, i.e., some sort of interest.’⁷ Insofar as these two types of judgements of taste ‘are always combined with an interest in their object’, they are what Kant calls ‘interested’ judgements: ‘All interest presupposes a need or produces one; and as a determining ground of approval it no longer leaves the judgment on the object free.’⁸ By contrast, while I contemplate a beautiful object, my experience as well as my judgement of it takes place independently of *any* interest I may happen to have in the object, whether my interest is negative or positive:

Only that of the taste for the beautiful is a disinterested and *free* satisfaction; for no interest, neither that of the senses nor that of reason, extorts approval.⁹

On this basis, the relevant contrary of judgements of beauty consists in judgements that not only involve an interest, but do so in a negative fashion. That is to say, while positive judgements of taste involve an interest in the existence of the object, the objects we call ugly contravene our interests, whatever they may be, and for this reason give rise to a desire to dispose of them. Furthermore, as I am about to show, there are in fact four ways in which our interests can be contravened, which give rise to four different types of impure ugliness. I will examine them in turn.

The first kind of impure ugliness consists in the contrary of adherent beauty, which, by contrast to free beauty, ‘does presuppose such a concept of [what the object ought to be] ... as adhering to a concept (conditioned beauty), [it is] ascribed to objects that stand under the concept of a particular end.’¹⁰ An object can be judged beautiful qua its kind rather than *tout court*, and on this basis, adherent ugliness, as the contrary of adherent beauty, consists in the judgement that it fails to meet the criteria spelt out by the concept that specifies how it ought to appear. In his *Lectures on Anthropology*, Kant suggests, somewhat unfortunately, that an old woman is a good example of adherent ugliness:

6 *CJ*, 92 (5:207).

7 *CJ*, 93 (5:207).

8 *CJ*, 94 (5:209).

9 *CJ*, 95 (5:210). See also ‘*Taste* is the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction *without any interest*. The object of such a satisfaction is called beautiful’ (*CJ*, 96 (5:211)). There is a large amount of literature on the notion of interest and its role in Kant’s account of beauty, but unfortunately there is no space to discuss it here. See, for instance, P. Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), ch. 5; and H. Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), ch. 4.

10 *CJ*, 114 (5:229).

In regard to the two sexes, the judgments are very different, just as the judgments of beauty were, for we assess the beauty of a man and of a woman from different points of view. We consider the man's beauty and ugliness from the standpoint of masculine strength and industriousness, but we compare the *beauty and ugliness* of the woman with our inclination; hence an old woman always looks uglier than an old man, for we judge the woman according to the charm, but the man according to his manliness.¹¹

We judge the beauty and ugliness of the sexes according to different concepts specifying how they should appear, and old women fail to meet the standards spelt out by the concept of womanhood. This kind of impure ugliness could be called 'conceptual ugliness', for it contravenes our conceptual interests.

The second kind of impure ugliness stems from our passions: 'simply due to passion, one can portray something which one has seen as being ugly. For example, a beautiful, shady forest seems dreadful to me because I was unhappy there.'¹² Our passions and inclinations can disturb, interfere with and thus prevent a disinterested take on the object, thereby making it ugly. Thus, strictly speaking, the impure ugliness does not stem from the object itself but rather from the negative feelings associated with it (in Kant's example, a painful memory linked to a disagreeable feeling). This kind of impure ugliness could be called 'emotional ugliness', for it contravenes our emotional interests.

Finally, there are two additional kinds of impure ugliness, which generate 'distaste or disgust' (*Unschmackhaftigkeit oder Ekel*), 'both of which include the endeavor to push away a representation that is offered for enjoyment.'¹³ As Kant writes,

only one kind of ugliness cannot be represented in a way adequate to nature without destroying all aesthetic satisfaction, hence beauty in art, namely, that which arouses *loathing (Ekel)*. For since in this strange sensation, resting on sheer imagination, the object is represented as if it were imposing the enjoyment which we are nevertheless forcibly resisting, the artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation itself from the nature of the object itself, and it then becomes impossible for the former to be taken as beautiful.¹⁴

The first kind of ugliness, which arouses distaste (*Unschmackhaftigkeit*), can be accounted for by the lack of distinction between the representation of an object and the object itself. Since my sensibility strongly dislikes the object that is represented and I am unable to distinguish it from its artistic representation, I cannot adopt a disinterested perspective on it and judge the work of art aesthetically.¹⁵ For instance, if I have a phobia of dogs and if I am faced with the artistic representation of a dog, I may be unable to distinguish between the representation and the object itself, thus experiencing what we could call

11 *LA (Friedländer)*, 205 (25:665).

12 *LA (Friedländer)*, 83 (25:514–15).

13 *A*, 345 (7:241).

14 *CJ*, 190 (5:312).

15 In this sense, the difference between emotional ugliness and distasteful ugliness is that in the former the passion is directed to the object that is aesthetically judged, while in the latter the distaste is linked to the object that is represented rather than its artistic representation.

distasteful ugliness.¹⁶ This would be akin to cases when I am so hungry that I cannot judge the representation of an apple aesthetically; I can only see it as an object that would satisfy my hunger. I do not have the psychological resources to ignore my hunger or my phobia in order to adopt a disinterested perspective on the representation of the object—for instance, the sufficient strength of character, the ability to focus my attention, deal with my hunger, keep in mind that this is only a work of art, etc.¹⁷ However, it does not imply that I could not in principle adopt such a disinterested perspective; whether I can and do is contingent upon the kind of person I am.

By contrast with distasteful ugliness, the ugliness that generates disgust (*Ekel*) is due to a voluntary moral attitude rather than an involuntary psychological weakness. In spite of the fact that ‘the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting’, I believe that I ought not to apprehend it aesthetically but from a moral standpoint instead. It is thus by rejecting the distinction between the representation of the object and the object itself that I am able to resist the enjoyment of the representation of a disgusting object and feel moral outrage at the artistic representation of evil:

The artistic representation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation itself from the nature of the object itself, and it then becomes impossible for the former to be taken as beautiful.¹⁸

As a result, on the one hand, in the case of representations of distasteful objects, we can experience them as beautiful if we are psychologically able to distinguish between the representations of the objects and the objects themselves.¹⁹ If we are not, then we fall back into cases of distasteful ugliness. On the other hand, when evils—that is, morally repugnant characters or situations—are represented artistically, we can experience them as beautiful as long as we allow ourselves (i.e. we find it morally permissible) to distinguish between the representations of the objects and the objects themselves. This qualification is what makes the crucial difference, for it suggests that if we decide not to do so on moral grounds, we will not experience them as beautiful, thus falling back into cases of disgusting ugliness.²⁰

16 Note that what I judge to be distasteful is contingent upon my personality, my taste, my past history, etc.

17 This is suggested by Kant’s remark on the ‘Iroquois sachem, that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the cookshops’ (*CJ*, 90 (5:204)).

18 *CJ*, 190 (5:312).

19 This is the reason why Kant can claim that ‘beautiful art displays its excellence precisely by describing beautifully things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing. The furies, diseases, devastations of war, and the like can, as harmful things [*Schädlichkeiten*], be very beautifully described, indeed even represented in painting’ (*CJ*, 190 (5:312)). We are able to feel aesthetic pleasure in artistic representations of disagreeable objects, for they can be beautiful if well represented through art, as long as we are psychologically capable of distinguishing between the representations of the objects and the objects themselves.

20 Of course, it could be the case that in fact, I find it extremely difficult to distinguish between objects and their representation when immoral objects are represented, even when I believe that it is morally acceptable to do so. But this is a different issue insofar as it has to do with psychological factors. It could also be the case that I believe I ought not to feel pleasure at any representation of moral evil. But this is again a different issue because it has to do with my moral attitudes towards artistic representations of evil in general. For a discussion of these issues, see Cohen, ‘Kant’s Categories of Ugliness’.

To conclude, what the four different types of impure ugliness just delineated have in common is that their impurity stems from the same fact, namely they are all judgements based on feelings of interested displeasure. They are impure because of the very fact that the objects we call ugly in this sense contravene our interests, whether conceptual, emotional, sensuous, or moral. They are all cases in which the object causes a feeling of displeasure that produces a desire to dispose of it: ‘displeasure is that representation that contains the ground for determining the state of the representations to their own opposite (hindering or getting rid of them).’²¹ By contrast, pure aesthetic judgements are, for Kant, necessarily disinterested:

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.²²

While I contemplate a beautiful object, my judgement takes place independently of any interest I happen to have in the object, whether negative or positive. It is in this respect that judgements of impure ugliness are contrary to judgements of beauty. However, as already suggested in the introduction, the characteristics of beauty can be negated in another way, which gives rise to judgements of pure ugliness. The aim of the following section is to account for this possibility.

A Case for Pure Ugliness

Famously, the feeling of aesthetic pleasure that defines judgements of beauty involves what Kant calls ‘free play’ of imagination and understanding in which they harmonize with each other.

This merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object, or of the representation through which the object is given, precedes the pleasure in it, and is the ground of this pleasure in the harmony of the faculties of cognition.²³

This statement has generated ongoing debates among commentators, but for the purpose of this article, I want to focus on whether there can be such a thing as the opposite of a pleasurable free play—what I will call a displeasing ‘foul play’.²⁴ For, as I will argue, it alone can secure the possibility of pure ugliness in Kant’s account.

21 *CJ*, 105 (5:220).

22 *CJ*, 90–1 (5:205). See also the following passage: ‘The agreeable and the good both have a relation to the faculty of desire, and to this extent bring satisfaction with them ... Hence the judgment of taste is merely *contemplative*, i.e., a judgment that, indifferent with regard to the existence of an object, merely connects its constitution together with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure’ (*CJ*, 95 (5:209)).

23 *CJ*, 103 (5:218).

24 For an overview of these debates, see P. Guyer, ‘The Harmony of the Faculties Revisited’, in R. Kukla (ed.), *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant’s Critical Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 162–93.

To make sense of this claim, I have summed up the characteristics of judgements of pure beauty in the following way, based on Kant's definition of beauty in four moments according to the table of judgements.

- (1) (Quality) Disinterested *pleasure*
- (2) (Quantity) Universal validity
- (3) (Relation) *Purposiveness* without a purpose
- (4) (Modality) Necessary *liking*.²⁵

Judgements of beauty (1) are based on a disinterested feeling of pleasure, (2) make a claim to universal validity that does not include concepts, (3) involve a representation of purposiveness that does not comprise the ascription of an end, and (4) are taken to be universally valid.²⁶ By contrast, judgements of pure ugliness should retain all the characteristics of purity, while substituting the characteristics that make it beautiful with the ones that make it ugly.²⁷

- (1′) Disinterested *displeasure*
- (2′) Universal validity²⁸
- (3′) *Counterpurposiveness* without a purpose
- (4′) Necessary *disliking*.

Pure ugliness presents all the characteristics that make it properly speaking pure (i.e. disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness without purpose, and necessity) together with the characteristics that make it the contrary of beautiful (i.e. displeasure, counterpurposiveness, and disliking).

However, the problematic claim seems to be (3′), for, if it is granted, then (1′) and (4′) follow quite naturally. Insofar as the experience of pure beauty consists in a harmonious free play between imagination and understanding, pure ugliness has to engage the same faculties albeit in an opposite fashion—that is to say, a disharmonious free play between imagination and understanding.²⁹ Yet the possibility of such a disharmony seems to contravene one of the basic tenets of Kant's transcendental idealism; namely, if there were either no harmony or a disharmony between imagination and understanding, experience would not be possible. For Kant's account of cognition states that for a subject to be able to have any experience, there must be an operation of synthesis between the concepts of the

25 See *CJ*, 89–124 (5:203–40).

26 For a detailed discussion of these four moments, see, for instance, Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, chs 3–6.

27 Correlatively, the aesthetically indifferent can be spelt out as follows: (1*) Neither pleasure nor displeasure; (2*) Universal validity; (3*) Neither purposiveness, nor counterpurposiveness; (4*) Neither liking nor disliking.

28 In this sense, the only feature that remains unchanged is the judgements' universal validity. This is in fact a benefit of my interpretation, since we should hang on to the claim that pure judgements of ugliness make the same universal demand as pure judgements of beauty.

29 Contrary to Gracyk, it is because the same faculties as in pure judgements of beauty have to be engaged that pure ugliness cannot consist in the displeasure felt in the experience of the sublime (T. A. Gracyk, 'Sublimity, Ugliness, and Formlessness in Kant's Aesthetic Theory', *JAC* 45 (1986), 49–56). Since 'sublime displeasure' is accounted for by a disharmony between imagination and reason rather than imagination and understanding, it is sufficient to distinguish it from 'ugly displeasure' (see *CJ*, 128–9 (5:244–5)).

understanding and the intuitions schematized by the imagination.³⁰ So without a harmony between understanding and imagination, there would be no experience: ‘so far as [imagination and understanding] agree with each other as is requisite for a *cognition in general*.’³¹ As Guyer notes, ‘a state of sheer disharmony [between imagination and understanding] is not consistent with the transcendental unity of apperception. So harmony without a concept or harmony with a concept, but no simple absence of harmony: this, in a nutshell, is why Kant cannot allow a purely aesthetic origin for ugliness.’³² If this is correct, then the idea of a disharmonious free play between imagination and understanding is a non-starter, and there is no room for the experience of pure ugliness in Kant’s account.

However, I believe that this objection can be addressed if we further specify the different functions of the harmony between imagination and understanding. While I judge a rose aesthetically, I am nevertheless aware of the fact that it is a rose, even if do not pay attention to it. As Kant notes,

Flowers are free natural beauties. Hardly anyone other than the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is supposed to be; and even the botanist, who recognizes in it the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end if he judges the flower by means of taste.³³

I have thus applied the concept of rose, through ‘determinant’ judgement, to the given of intuition, and in this respect, the imagination and the understanding function in harmony. But this cognitive harmony happens together with the fact that, from the perspective of aesthetic judgement—that is, ‘reflective’ judgement—no concept is applied and the imagination and the understanding are in harmonious free play: ‘The powers of cognition that are set into play by this representation are hereby in a free play, since no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition.’³⁴ In other words, in the experience of pure beauty, I experience simultaneously cognitive and aesthetic harmony between imagination and understanding, although they differ insofar as in the former a concept is applied while in the latter no concept is applied.³⁵ Likewise in the experience of the aesthetically indifferent, I experience simultaneously cognitive harmony and no aesthetic harmony, since in this case there is no free play between imagination and understanding. So by the same token, in the experience of pure ugliness, there would be simultaneously cognitive harmony so as to allow for my experiencing the rose qua object,

30 See for instance *CPR*, 65 (A19/B33).

31 *CJ*, 103 (5:218).

32 P. Guyer, ‘Kant on the Purity of the Ugly’, in *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 147.

33 *CJ*, 114 (5:229).

34 *CJ*, 102 (5:217). By contrast with determinant judgements in which the universal is given and the particular is subsumed under it, reflective judgements are judgements in which the particular alone is given and the universal has to be found: ‘If, however, only the particular is given, for which the universal is to be found, then the power of judgment is merely *reflecting*’ (*CJ*, 67 (5:179)).

35 In this sense, to go back to Guyer’s objection, it is not the case that in the experience of pure ugliness, there is a ‘simple absence of harmony’, for there is always cognitive harmony for the experience as such to be possible (Guyer, ‘Kant on the Purity of the Ugly’, 147).

and yet aesthetic disharmony insofar as I would be experiencing foul play rather than free play between imagination and understanding.

Yet one could object that Kant's conception of our mental faculties and their functioning in fact makes it impossible. Since cognitive harmony should be a given for the experience to be at all possible, a disharmonious free play would be incompatible with it, for, the same faculties being at play in both operations of the mind, first, their interplay can only be of one kind at any given time; and second, their free play has to be of the same kind. As a result, the free play between imagination and understanding can only be defined as an 'excess' of harmonious unity that goes beyond the mere cognitive harmony between them, and if so, their aesthetic disharmony is impossible in principle.³⁶

However, Kant provides many examples of faculties working in a dynamic way that is compatible with my suggestion. For instance, a 'savage' who sees a town house for the first time 'determinantly' applies the empirical concept of 'place where people live' (thus imagination and understanding being in harmony), while 'reflectively' looking for a concept, distinct from that of 'hut', which he does have, that would better fit the object (thus imagination and understanding being in disharmony, or at least not in harmony).³⁷ So in this example, the same faculties can simultaneously be in harmony in one respect and disharmony (or lack of harmony) in another.³⁸ If so, it is more appropriate to describe mental faculties as dynamic functions rather than static entities, and thus as capable of multitasking when the tasks involve distinct functions. For instance, while I cannot have two simultaneous phone conversations, I can email and phone at the same time; I can even send a nasty email to someone while being nice on the phone to someone else. This analogy suggests that contrary to the traditional interpretation of the harmony between imagination and understanding as essentially cognitive in nature, there is no compelling reason to believe that the harmony required by cognition is necessarily of a kind with the harmony entailed by the experience of the beautiful.³⁹ As a result, imagination and understanding can be in harmonious 'un-free' play cognitively through the determinant use of judgement and yet in disharmonious free play aesthetically through the reflective use of judgement.

36 See, for instance, 'for Kant all consciousness of an object must involve its subsumption under some determinate concept, so that the felt harmony of the manifold of representation afforded by an object with the understanding's general requirement of unity must be a feeling that it is unified in a way that goes beyond the unity that is dictated by whatever determinate concept the object is subsumed under—an *excess* of felt unity or harmony' (Guyer, 'Kant on the Purity of the Ugly', 149).

37 See, for instance, *A*, 299 (7:191).

38 An additional benefit of this interpretation is that it preserves the distinction between cognitive and aesthetic judgements in a way that avoids cases where any object, insofar as it is cognized, becomes pleasurable because it feels purposive for the harmonious interplay of our faculties. This would entail that every object is beautiful and thus that nothing can be either aesthetically indifferent or ugly. A number of commentators have argued that Kant's aesthetic theory commits him to this position (see e.g. Shier, 'Why Kant Finds Nothing Ugly', and Thomson, 'Kant's Problem with Ugliness').

39 Contrast with Allison's interpretation, which puts forward a gradual model in which there can be more or less cognitive harmony between the faculties rather than different kinds of harmony (Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, 117).

Now that the difficulties threatening the possibility of the compatibility of cognitive and aesthetic disharmony between imagination and understanding have been removed, the idea of foul play does not seem to be particularly problematic anymore, especially if we turn to a number of passages from some of Kant's *Reflections* ranging from 1772 to 1795: 'beautiful, ordinary, ugly', 'that which hinders our free play and against which our mind has to fight, that we dislike', 'ugliness is thus something positive, not merely lack of beauty, but the existence of something opposite to beauty', 'ugliness is something positive as well as is beauty', 'counterplay is not merely something negative, but really something positive'.⁴⁰ These confirm that there are two types of free play between imagination and understanding, one that is pleasurable and gives rise to judgements of beauty, and one that is displeasurable and gives rise to judgements of ugliness (what is called here 'counterplay' and I have called foul play).⁴¹ Kant does not seem to suggest anything else in the following passage:

The judging of an object through taste is a judgment about the harmony *or discord* of freedom, in the play of the power of imagination and the lawfulness of understanding, and therefore it is a matter only of judging the form aesthetically (the compatibility of the sense representations) not the generation of products, in which the form is perceived.⁴²

On this basis, we could simply rewrite the passages describing the harmonious free play in the following way: 'the *hindered [instead of facilitated]* play of the two mental powers (imagination and understanding), *inhibited [instead of enlivened]* by *reciprocal disharmony [instead of reciprocal harmony]*'.⁴³

Let me end with the following illustration. I go to a museum and contemplate a painting. I have experienced the feeling of the beautiful before, so I know what it feels like. While I know that it is a painting (I may even know that it is a painting of a man, say), I am not feeling aesthetic pleasure, but rather displeasure. So I judge this painting is ugly. And if I am asked to justify my appraisal, I may begin by explaining that what I mean by 'ugly' here is aesthetically pure, by which I mean that my judgement is disinterested and thus not a case of either conceptual, emotional, distasteful, or disgusting ugliness. The only way that it differs from judgements of the beautiful is thus that, not only does the object 'not do anything for me' (in which case it would merely leave me aesthetically indifferent), but also it 'goes against me', that is to say, it generates a displeasure that can only be explained aesthetically since all the other cases of ugliness have been ruled out.⁴⁴ This

40 *Reflection* 669, 1922, 1946; *Lecture on Logic Philippi* (24:364); *Lecture on Logic Dohna-Wundlaken* (24:708, 710), translated by Wenzel in 'Kant Finds Nothing Ugly?', 418.

41 For an argument that leads to a similar conclusion, see Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, 116–7. For a critical discussion of Allison's claim, see Guyer, 'Kant on the Purity of the Ugly', 145–7.

42 *A*, 344 (7:241); my emphasis.

43 *CJ*, 104 (5:219); translation modified.

44 As Guyer notes in the case of the pleasurable free play between imagination and understanding, we come to recognize that the feeling of pleasure is due to the free play because reflection on the causal history of the pleasure warrants it—for instance by a process of elimination, insofar as it is neither sensory nor due to the satisfaction of a desire (Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 99–119). On my interpretation, a similar process takes place in the case of the displeasurable free play.

displeasure, I am told, is caused by a foul play between my imagination and understanding; they are in aesthetic disharmony. I am also told that in cases when I have felt aesthetic pleasure, my imagination and understanding were in harmony, and that the pleasure I felt was the result of their harmonious free play. Of course, I was not aware of this free play as such, I was simply aware of feeling aesthetic pleasure, a pleasure I expressed by saying ‘this object is beautiful’. Similarly in the case of foul play, I am not aware of it either; I merely experience a feeling of aesthetic displeasure that I express by saying ‘this object is ugly’.⁴⁵ In fact, there are numerous instances in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* itself where Kant accompanies his claim about aesthetic pleasure with the mention of displeasure. For instance,

In order to decide whether or not something is beautiful, we do not relate the representation by means of understanding to the object for cognition, but rather relate it by means of the imagination (perhaps combined with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure *or displeasure*.⁴⁶

As a result, if one is happy to grant the possibility of pleasurable free play, I do not see why one would not want to concede displeasurable free play, that is, foul play, as well. Of course, one could argue that Kant’s notion of free play is not only obscure but also unhelpful as an explanatory tool. As Guyer has often noted, ‘the concept of the harmonious free play of imagination and understanding is obscure’; ‘Kant does not completely clarify his central explanatory concept of the harmony of imagination and understanding.’⁴⁷ However, this is a different issue. For on my interpretation, it does not seem that the disharmonious free play is any more obscure than the harmonious free play.

Conclusion

This article has set out to argue that Kant’s account of beauty commits him not only to the existence of the ugly, but more specifically to the distinction between two kinds of ugliness. This is because, as I have shown, the characteristics of beauty can be negated in two ways: one that involves an interest, which gives rise to impure ugliness, and the other that involves a displeasurable free play, which gives rise to pure ugliness—thereby mirroring the distinction between pure and impure beauty.

After having shown that impure ugliness is the contrary of beauty insofar as it contravenes our interests and produces a desire to dispose of it, I have suggested that pure ugliness presents all the characteristics that make it properly speaking pure (i.e. disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness without purpose, and necessity) together with the characteristics that make it the contrary of beautiful (i.e. displeasure, counterpurposiveness, and disliking). I have supported this claim by showing that the obstacles that seemed to threaten it can be removed insofar as cognitive harmony between imagination and

45 And in the case when no free play is experienced, I judge the object to be simply aesthetically indifferent. In this case, the only interplay between imagination and understanding that occurs is one of cognitive harmony.

46 *CJ*, 89 (5:203); my emphasis.

47 Guyer, ‘Harmony of the Faculties Revisited’, 163; *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 10, see also 220–7.

understanding can occur simultaneously with their aesthetic disharmony. On this basis, I have concluded that if there is to be room for pure ugliness in Kant's account, it resides in what I have called foul play between imagination and understanding.

However, if one remains unconvinced both by the notion of free play and that of foul play, it may seem more convincing to argue, as Guyer does, that Kant does have a notion of the ugly, but that this notion is not pure but rather connected to our interests.⁴⁸ In this sense, judgements of ugliness are impure because of the very fact that the objects we call 'ugly' in some sense contravene our interests, whatever they may be. This may not be such a bad picture after all. What is clear, however, is that my article has shown that Kant does have a notion of the ugly.⁴⁹

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48 See Guyer, 'Kant on the Purity of the Ugly', 161.

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