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Explaining the Ugly*

Disharmony and Unrestrained Cognition in Kant

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> *That which pleases through mere intuition is beautiful,*
> *that which leaves me indifferent in intuition […] is non-beautiful;*
> *that which displeases me in intuition is ugly.*
>
> Immanuel Kant (MV, 29:1010)[1]

Studying Kant's aesthetics one might suspect a striking omission; many have done so. In arguing for his theory of pure reflective judgments of taste Kant extensively analyses beauty, but almost wholly disregards ugliness. We commonly take ugliness as paradigmatic when we reflect on our negative aesthetic judgments, and so does Kant. Consequently, there ought to be a more explicit story explaining how Kantian judgments of ugliness are possible. And precisely here matters get complicated: it turns out to be a substantive question whether Kant actually has any theoretical leeway for an explanation that adequately captures the phenomenon of ugliness as we know it. Can Kant allow for genuine judgments of ugliness?

Every time we make a pure aesthetic judgment—a judgment of taste—and judge that something is beautiful, Kant's famous description of what is going on is that our cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding engage in a harmonious free play. The pleasure that this free play results in is the ground for our aesthetic judgment that a swan, say, is beautiful. Now, in accounting for judgments of ugliness we might propose to use the opposing idea of a *disharmony* as explanans. Imagine an encounter with a warty toad. When we judge this creature to be ugly, the proposed explanation runs, the faculties of imagination and understanding clash and work against each other. This kind of cognitive conflict results in the displeasure we feel when experiencing things

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like ugly toads. And this feeling of displeasure is the ground for our conclusion that such an object is ugly.

This proposal is controversial, as it encompasses a rather bold reversal of a key concept in Kant's argumentation—is it really possible that the inverse of harmony makes felt the distinct displeasure associated with ugliness? Moreover, how much sense does the very idea of disharmonious cognition or judgment make in light of Kant�s transcendental philosophy? Recently Paul Guyer (Guyer 2005) has forcefully argued that Kant's epistemology does not allow for such wayward cognition in the first place. We all remember the lessons from the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant argues that what partly constitutes any experience is a co-operative functioning of cognition, and a disharmony can hardly be understood as co-operative.

Despite these difficulties, in this paper I argue that a disharmony is the key to understanding Kantian ugliness. This way, an answer to the question of ugliness in Kant can be given in terms of a disharmonious free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding. To appreciate this answer, it is firstly required to get a more adequate understanding of what it is that is asked for (§1). I will argue that the question as it is normally raised in the literature already assumes too much of an answer. In §2 I touch on some relevant points in Kant's exposition of judgments of beauty, in order to understand the cognitive functioning that underpins our positive and negative feelings in judging appearances of things. After that, I reconstruct Henri Allison's account (§3), who defends the idea that a disharmonious free play can explain ugliness as a negative judgment of taste. In response to this, I argue in §4 how Allison's account, and any account similar to it, cannot overcome Guyer's epistemic objection. But I also argue that Guyer's epistemological claim needs to be weakened to avoid absurdity. This allows me to present a more modest proposal of how to understand Kantian ugliness in the final section (§5).

1 Diagnosing the debate: catfish and Milton's Death

If we ask an explanation of ugliness in terms of Kant's aesthetics, what precisely is the phenomenon that demands explication? What we take to be ugly, to use Garrett Thomson's imaginative examples, are things like crabs' faces, cows' faeces, catfish, and monkey's bottoms (Thomson 1992, p. 107). Given this, it is all too easily supposed that, just as for us, 'ugliness' [*Häßlichkeit*] is for Kant a term for nasty looks.[2] Kant obviously defends that judgments of beauty are based on how things appear to us. In fact, this is his key insight;

that our way to experience pure beauty is in a judgment of *taste*, a judgment based exclusively on the object's formal presentation in intuition—it is based on how an object appears to us. On this line of reasoning it might be equally expected that, given that ugliness is about looks as well, also ugliness can be recognised in a judgment of taste.

Sean McConnell, for instance, straightforwardly takes the apparent omission in Kant to be one of a pure judgment of ugliness; a negative judgment of *taste* (McConnell 2008). Likewise, David Shier directly takes it that what misses in Kant's theory is a clear story about how ugliness is recognised in such a negative judgment of taste (Shier 1998, p. 412-13). Yet, any such starting point seems to be inspired by our contemporary usage of 'ugliness' as a concept for nasty looks. Before assuming that this also is what the author of the third *Critique* ought to account for, it must be considered that what Kant precisely held to be the nature of ugliness might turn out to be more complex.

1.1 Kantian ugliness?

Kant recognises that ugliness exists. "Beautiful art," he observes, "displays its excellence precisely by describing beautifully things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing" (*CJ* 5:312). He clearly sees an opposition between ugliness and beauty. From this we might infer that to ugliness belongs an aesthetic judgment, analogous to the judgment of beauty, but opposing it in relevant respects. Logically, for any concepts to be opposites in the first place they must at least have something in common, and it is plausible that here Kant holds the aesthetic dimension to be the common factor involved in both beauty and ugliness. In that way, beauty and ugliness mark endpoints of an aesthetic spectrum.

I contend that this is the right conclusion to draw: to ugliness belongs an aesthetic judgment. But in making the inference, two points about Kant's aesthetics are crucial. The one is about the nature of the opposition, and the other concerns the nature of judgments that are aesthetic. First, beauty and ugliness are for Kant not contradictories but only contraries. No more than one of these attributes (i.e. beautiful, ugly) can hold for a thing at a time, but it is also possible that neither of them applies. This picture shows up clearest in Kant's logical writings, where he states that"ugliness is thus something positive, not a mere lack of beauty, but also the existence of that which is opposed to beauty" (LP 24:708).[3] Accordingly, it is no logical truth that all not-beautiful things are ugly, as they can be neutral as well. Another illustration here is the three-valued model Kant often repeats: 'Beautiful – Neutral – Ugly' (e.g. NF 15:296). This prominently gives aesthetic neutrality its place, separating beauty and ugliness. Consequently, even if our inference about ugliness as involving

aesthetic judgment is correct, a simple negation of his account of beauty looks to be too coarse to do the work, as this takes neutrality on board as well.

The second point, which is vital, is that Kant uses 'aesthetic' notably broader than we currently do: it strictly applies to all judgments pertaining to feeling (CJ 5:204). So although his theory includes a reflective aesthetics concerned with disinterested judgments of appearance of form, it additionally encompasses both practical aesthetic judgments that make moral value or usefulness felt, and pathological aesthetic judgments with a feeling due to visceral sensation (FI 20:232). The first allow you to judge that a sunset is pretty, the second that your broom has a good grip and excellent balance, and the last that the hot footbath you take is gratifying.

It is important to note that practical and pathological aesthetic judgments can never lead to the recognition of beauty. The reason for this is a metaphysical one: Kantian aesthetic judgments are identified by what we can call the 'subjective source' of pleasure or displeasure. In other words, it is the source of feeling that makes an aesthetic judgment of the kind it is.[4] The important point Kant wishes to make is that when we experience beauty we feel a pleasure brought about in a specific way, namely resulting from an unrestricted play of imagination and understanding. It is this play that is the source that identifies reflective judgments. Accordingly, given that practical and pathological judgments by necessity differ in source, these different types of aesthetic judgment can never lead to the recognition of beauty.

Kant is clear about the difference in source of the several aesthetic judgment types. Practical aesthetic judgments have a solely intellectual, and pathological judgments a solely sensuous source (CJ 5:208-9). By contrast, it is the very core of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that reflective aesthetic judgments have a source that is hybrid in quite a special way, conjoining both senses and intellect. The upshot of this is that the general contention that ugliness is recognised in an aesthetic judgment still leaves important questions open. Surely, it does not invalidate the earlier inference that ugliness is aesthetic, but it does importantly qualify it.

1.2 Which kind of ugliness?

What needs to be resolved is which of the three different kinds of aesthetic judgment Kant had in mind when he wrote of ugliness. And this is not straightforward. Take the figure of Death in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, used by Kant as a prime example of ugliness:

> If shape it might be call'd that shape had none
> Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb,

> Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
> For each seem'd either' black it stood as Night,
> Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,
> And shook a dreadful Dart; what seem'd his head
> The likeness of a Kingly Crown had on. (Milton 1667, 2: 667-73)

What does the work here? The displeasure we would experience if we would face Death as Milton describes him could be of various kinds, relating to any of the judgments mentioned above: it could be practical (Death is evil), or pathological (he is frightening), just as well as reflectively aesthetic (he is formless). And all of Kant's other examples, such as the sight of disease or the devastations of war, share this ambiguity (CJ 5:312).

What this indicates is that, although it is certainly plausible to understand them as a kind of aesthetic judgment, it is not decided whether judgments of ugliness are of the same narrower kind as judgments of beauty, *viz.* whether judgments of ugliness are properly reflective. Additionally, it is even a further step to suppose that ugliness fits a *pure* reflective judgment—a judgment of taste. Here it is important to remember that Kant explicitly distinguishes between such pure judgments of taste and *adherent* reflective judgments, in which we judge not solely the object's form but make a reflective aesthetic judgment alongside a concept (CJ 5:229). It is essential to such adherent judgments that we judge how an object appears to us *as* an x. To illustrate, when we perceive a rose we can on the one hand make a judgment of taste, and judge on the basis of this object's mere appearance, and on the other hand make an adherent judgment and judge its appearance *as of a rose*. Both are reflective aesthetic judgments, but their outcomes easily diverge. A fungal infection of the rose's petals might actually make a pleasing contribution to the flower's merely formal appearance, yet it will probably result in displeasure if we judge the contaminated sight as of the rose it is. Even though Kant focuses mainly on the pure reflective judgment of taste, it is crucial that adherent judgments form a genuine dimension in our everyday encounter with beautiful things.

As a result, it cannot just be assumed that Kant understands ugliness as recognised in a reflective aesthetic judgment, and we should be careful as well with the presumption that the judgment of ugliness must be pure. If we look for an account of ugliness on Kant's own terms, it already appears sufficient for him to facilitate a theory either of pathological or of practical ugliness. Such a theory should provide an explication of the cause of displeasure in ugly things, and in this way account for negative aesthetic judgments. And as a matter of fact, we find such an account of pathological ugliness in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Pathological ugliness is a kind of ugliness that arouses loathing—a displeasure described as"a strange sensation, resting on sheer imagination" (CJ

5:312). Intellect is not involved; it is displeasure of a purely sensuous nature, but aesthetic displeasure nonetheless. No further philosophical explanation is needed, as such sensuous displeasures rest on contingent biological facts. So in a sense, Kant might not have omitted anything about ugliness—this may be all there is to say.

This explanation is both crude and disappointing. However, it supports the very purpose of the previous discussion: firstly, that we recognise that there might not be any major role for ugliness in Kant, which would explain its absence in his aesthetic theory. Surely, it is a genuine phenomenon that demands explanation, but we should not be surprised by an account portraying ugliness as sideline phenomenon that is not recognised in a pure judgment of taste at all. Secondly, the previous discussion reveals what people really worry about when they wonder whether Kant can allow for ugliness: what we call 'ugliness' would in Kant's terms already be a genuinely reflective ugliness. We take there to be a negative pole to our experiences of beauty, and regard this as a real dimension to how things appear to us. The motivation for worry is that when Kant cannot incorporate this dimension of our aesthetic lives, his theory simply is lacking. So we ask, is there a genuine reflective ugliness for Kant? More precisely, what we wonder is whether Kant can allow a displeasure stemming from the *same* subjective source as the one that constitutes our pleasure in the beautiful. However, the answer to this question is not necessarily the same as the answer to the question whether Kant allows a negative judgment of *taste*—a pure reflective judgment of ugliness. This conclusion is pivotal and has been largely overlooked.

2 Pure reflective judgments of beauty

To be able to see whether Kant can allow the source of the reflective judgment of beauty to bring about a displeasure, it of course needs to be understood what this source is. This leads to Kant's 'Analytic of Beauty', the first part of the third *Critique*. As is well known, this third *Critique* functions as a capstone for the larger system Kant initiated with the earlier two. The very grounding of the faculties of understanding and reason as provided in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* respectively, Kant realised, ultimately depends on an indubitable basis for the faculty of judgment. He proceeds by arguing for the a priori basis for a specific type of judgment—a single type suffices as proof that the faculty of judgment in toto has grounding prior to experience. The type of judgment Kant has in mind is of course the peculiar judgment of taste.[5] Epically phrased, when the judgment of taste can be shown to have a priori justification, Kant's work is done.

2.1 The foundations of judgment

Such larger systemic underpinnings are significant in themselves, as they embody a constraint that should prevent us to interpret the third *Critique* in isolation. In other words, any answer to the question whether Kant can allow for reflective ugliness depends on consistency with the earlier *Critiques* as well. The key interest in Kant's system at this point, however, is in how it helps to determine the source of pleasure in judgments of beauty as reflective aesthetic judgments of taste. For Kant precisely this source is a pressing issue. To establish that judgments of taste indeed rest on a priori principles, it needs to be established that such judgments on the one hand are universally communicable, and on the other claim universal validity; these are the essential preconditions of a priori knowledge as defended in the first *Critique*. However, since it only can be a pure judgment that allows for this a priori grounding, the bewildering difficulty is that this universally communicable and valid judgment must be based solely on judgment itself (hence 'reflective')—its outcome cannot be build on what we judge, but must find grounding in the very act of judging.

This purity requirement explains firstly why Kant stresses that the pure judgment of taste cannot include any sensuous pleasure, and secondly why it cannot be based on concepts; both would already imply going beyond judgment. In particular the second poses a direct problem. Remembering the first *Critique*, where Kant shows that concepts of understanding are simply required for justification of our judgments—the core of transcendental idealism—it does seem that without help of cognition the prospects for the a priori grounding of a non-conceptual judgment are rather dim.

Kant comes up with a solution that is both original and notorious. Briefly reconstructed, he first of all makes clear that the very structure of this pure judgment implies that it will be disinterested towards the object judged. Because it is pure, there must be no logical dependency on concepts or sensuous imagination. Only the way the object appears to us matters; its actual existence is irrelevant. Accordingly, there is no basis for any desiring attitude towards the object—the judgment is based purely on how a representation, imaginatively formed out of intuition, is held up for understanding. Because it is pure and thus disinterested, everyone would judge the same, given that we simply share these same rational faculties. This way our judgment of taste is universally communicable (CJ 5:211).

However, universal *validity* cannot be that easily obtained. Kant's entire system of transcendental idealism centers on the key insight that judgments are only valid in virtue of facts about cognition itself. For example, the laws of Newtonian physics are valid, according to Kant, because they can be grounded a priori on a set of necessary concepts of understanding, such as causality and

succession. A pure judgment of taste cannot depend on concepts, however. So for it to be universally valid as well, this lack of concepts must somehow be made up for. Kant finds a way to do this by recognising a special role for cognition in pure judgments of taste. As he contends, "it can be nothing other than the state of mind that is encountered in the relation of the powers of representation to each other insofar as they relate a given representation to *cognition in general*" (CJ 5:217, my emphasis).

We see that, although the content of this pure judgment is strictly nonconceptual, 'cognition in general' stands in, as part of its content. This way, Kant writes, "the state of mind in this representation must be that of a feeling of the *free play* of the powers of representation," where these powers are imagination, which orders the manifold presented in intuition, and understanding, which applies the concepts that unify our representations (CJ 5:217). This state of free play, as it arises in the pure judgment of taste, must be a candidate for universal communicability, at least among rational agents, because *cognition itself* is a determining factor in the occurrence of this state. And the pure judgment of taste is universally valid as well, precisely because a representation of cognition is the only kind of representation valid for everyone (CJ 5:217).

2.2 Sources of pleasure

The preceding helps in understanding the source of pleasure in beauty. But one more thing needs to be asked: if this state of free play is brought about in the pure judgment of beauty, what then brings about its pleasure? Fortunately Kant is reasonably clear on this, and argues that our pleasure in beauty is a pleasure in the harmony of the unrestrained functioning of cognition (CJ 5:217). Our pleasure in beauty is due to imagination and understanding being brought in a *harmonious* free play.

At this point it not only has become clear that it is a mental state of a harmonious free play between imagination and understanding that is the source of pleasure in a pure judgment of beauty, but also a clearer grasp of the cognitive functioning that underpins it has become possible. This allows a focus on the issue whether the kind of mental operation involved in reflective judgments, like those of taste, could also give rise to displeasure. Given that a harmony is the exact cause of pleasure, we directly see how plausible it is to proceed by taking a *disharmony* of the interplay as the responsible factor in a feeling of reflective aesthetic displeasure. In the next section I consider how Henri Allison defends this suggestion.

3 Allison's pursuit of purity

Allison takes it that accounting for the possibility of negative judgments"is criterial for the adequacy of an interpretation of Kant's theory of taste" (Allison 2001, p. 115). Of course we should agree. However, Allison further stresses the need for a pure reflective aesthetic judgment of ugliness, and in §1 I argued that this might very well be unreasonable to demand of Kant's theory. Allison does not seem to have a direct argument for why we should look for purity here. The only thing he says is that "our basic intuitions about aesthetic valuations surely indicate that negative judgments must have the same status (as judgments of taste) and the same claim to validity as their positive counterpart" (ibid., p. 71). Moreover, he sees additional support in the three-valued logic as was introduced earlier, in which ugliness is more than just the absence of beauty (ibid., p. 71). But as I argued, our common sense has only a single ballot here, since there is ample of textual evidence that Kant's use of 'ugly' might very well not conform to ours. And since bringing out Kant's recognition of aesthetic neutrality itself cannot establish the need for a pure negative judgment of taste, the jury is still out; at least until more substantial evidence is given of how pure judgments of ugliness are possible. And providing this is precisely Allison's aim.

The main problem Allison faces is to take away doubts that Kant can in fact conceive of a state of disharmonious free play. Some might suspect namely that Kant uses 'harmonious' and 'free' connected, so that a free play is always already harmonious. In that case, a disharmonious free play is logically impossible.

Allison believes it is "essential to distinguish between this harmony of the faculties and their free play" (ibid., p. 116). 'Free' denotes the operation of unrestrained cognition that can result either in a disinterested pleasure or in a disinterested displeasure, he states. Rather strong support for this view is found in Kant's literal opening statement of the third *Critique*, where he announces that we relate a given representation to the feelings of pleasure *and displeasure*. Furthermore, and no less important, only the possibility of displeasure in reflective judgments allows the 'quarrels about taste', on which Kant so heavily relies (ibid., p. 71). That both pleasure and displeasure are possible in reflective judgments, Allison explains, "stem[s] from the fact that such reflection can either succeed or fail to produce a harmonious relation of the faculties" (ibid., p. 116). If it succeeds, this harmony pleases and constitutes a judgment of beauty, while if the harmony palpably fails, "the outcome of the free play is a state of *dis*harmony, where the faculties hinder rather than help one another in their reciprocal tasks, thereby producing a state of disinterested displeasure and a negative judgment of taste" (ibid., p. 117). Allison again is able to cite Kant in support: "To judge an object by taste is to judge whether freedom in the

play of the imagination harmonises or clashes with the lawfulness of the understanding" (AP 7:241). Accordingly, there are good reasons to believe that the harmony Kant speaks of is a qualification of the free play, and not essential to it.

This account of the possibility of pure reflective aesthetic displeasure is convincing. It shows how Kant indeed can allow for a reflective ugliness, an ugliness of disinterested appearance. What further speaks in favour of this reading is its explanatory potential. I reconstructed how reflective aesthetic judgments owe their felt character to the free play of understanding and imagination they are grounded in. Now, Allison's argument reveals how it is a particular qualification of this free interplay that is able to explain the difference between pleasure and displeasure in reflective aesthetic judgments.

4 The incoherence of disharmonious cognition

But we must be careful. I stressed that any reading of the *Critiques* must appreciate the larger system they make up. And how well does the idea of a disharmonious free play fit Kant's overarching system? Guyer maintains that the answer here is 'not at all', and he attacks Allison exactly on this point. According to Guyer, the proposal for displeasure in terms of a disharmony of the faculties is "blocked by the entire epistemology of the *Critique of Pure Reason*" (Guyer 2005, p. 146).

4.1 Epistemic requirements

What is precisely the problem Guyer observes? First of all he agrees with Allison that the state of mind grounding our pure judgment of beauty can be characterised as one of a harmonious free play of imagination and understanding that cannot rely on concepts, and that gives rise to pleasure. But Guyer rejects Allison's further claim that an inverse explanation can be employed to explain displeasure and the judgment of ugliness.

The motivation for this rejection is Kant's key thesis of transcendental apperception in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; that it must be possible for me to include any representation I have in the transcendental unity of my apperception—or as Kant states, that I must be able to accompany any such representation with an 'I think' (CR 4:B131). One thing this implies, Guyer contends, is that to be conscious of a representation, understanding must already be able to harmonise with imagination, for we have to conceptualise any object of representation through an empirical concept in order to be able to 'think it' (ibid., p. 146). This is involved in making any judgment involving experience. And

this leads Guyer to formulate what we can call an 'epistemic requirement':

(ER) A harmony between imagination and understanding is a *precondition* simply for being conscious of an object.

This Epistemic Requirement constrains any reading of Kant's aesthetic theory, and Guyer concludes that, though admittedly logically independent, the free play of imagination and understanding is cognitively necessarily connected with a harmony of functioning. It implies that the occurrence of a free play must itself already be sufficient for pleasure (ibid., p. 145). This is how we should conceive of Kantian beauty according to Guyer.

If this is phrased slightly differently, it can be seen that, since harmony is a more general cognitive condition that only makes possible a free play and thus cannot itself explain the pleasure in beauty, only the unrestrained play of the faculties can figure as a proper explanans of the pleasure in beauty. What makes us judge beauty simply is this state of free play. As a corollary, no appeal can be made to any *dis*harmonious free play without contradiction.

Now clearly Kant's thesis of transcendental apperception itself inevitably raises intricate epistemic issues, requiring treatment I cannot offer here. It is fair to say that Guyer correctly recalls the first *Critique*, and that the mutual operation of the faculties that is required for the application of empirical concepts is indeed necessary for every conscious representation. But even so, two open worries remain. Firstly, even apart from the Epistemic Requirement itself, the first *Critique*'s requirement of conceptualisation for conscious experience that was just granted seems to contradict the third *Critique*'s need for the non-conceptual nature of pure judgments of beauty; it was the purity of the judgment that demanded that no concepts should be involved. And secondly, it must be considered whether the epistemological harmony Guyer appeals to in his argument is indeed the 'harmony' Kant speaks of in the third *Critique*. On a closer look namely the idea of a harmony does not do much work in Guyer's argument. And in Kant's first *Critique* the concept occurs only twice: both times used very differently (CR 4:A390, 4:B331/A275).

Let me start with the first worry, the conflict between the third *Critique*'s demand for non-conceptuality and the first *Critique*'s demand for conceptualisation. Guyer is well aware of the problem, and his solution is elegant. He proposes a better understanding of how the free play comes about by stating that a pure judgment of beauty results in "a state of free play between [the faculties] that results in harmony without dependence upon any of the determinate empirical concepts that apply to the object of this state, although surely there are such concepts" (ibid., p. 147). This solution interprets Kant's requirement for purity as semantic: the *content* of the reflective judgment must be free from

concepts, while it is not necessary that the entire cognitive state underpinning it be conceptualisation-free. We judge on the basis of a perceptual experience that necessarily has a conceptual content, but the content of a judgment based on such experience can be non-conceptual.

On reflection this 'conceptualist' reading is quite plausible, and an additional argument even proves it inevitable:

> (1) Assume that we cannot actively decide to conceptualise the manifold that presents itself, *viz.* we cannot decide to recognise a tree as a tree, but this just happens as soon as we possess the concept TREE, and perceive a tree.
>
> (2) Then to claim that in appraising pure beauty we may not apply concepts at all would require the claim that in order to make a judgment of pure beauty we must be unable to recognise the object.

Such a strong requirement is implausible. It has the consequence that if we *would* be able to recognise, say, a waterfall, we could no longer judge the pure beauty of a particular waterfall, since we cannot help perceiving it conceptually, namely as a waterfall. We can judge objects purely on the basis of their form, yet be very familiar with what they are. To respond that this is no problem for the view that no concepts may be applied, because in such a case we simply abstract from our recognition to judge the object purely, would already be to endorse Guyer's very solution.

Indeed, the additional argument just introduced brings out that the possibility for abstraction becomes a requirement for pure judgments. On Guyer's conceptualist reading of Kantian experience, concepts will always be involved as a precondition of experience itself, even though they are not regarded a necessary part of the content of judgments based on experience. Such general possibility of abstraction is compatible with Kant, who makes a similarly general claim that he who judges an object with a determinate end can make a pure judgment if he "either had no concept of this end or abstracted from it in his judgment" (CJ 5:231). It turns out, then, that abstraction from conceptualisation must be a general requirement for pure reflective judgments.

The conclusion is that Guyer's objection to Allison, the objection based on a conceptualist reading of experience, implies no general threat to the project of Kant's third *Critique*. However, explanations of ugliness in terms of disharmony can only be ruled out if the Epistemic Requirement defined above is sound. And this ultimately depends on Guyer's understanding of 'harmony'—the indicated second worry.

For Guyer 'harmony' simply is equivalent to the cognitive co-operation of

imagination and understanding. Only this allows his premise that in cognition "the application of a concept to the manifold brings the faculty of understanding into harmony with a manifold of sensibility reproduced by the imagination" (Guyer 2005, p. 146). And indeed, this would establish the Epistemic Requirement.

However, there are good reasons to reject the simple conflation of cognitive harmony and cognitive co-operation. On Guyer's reading both ordinary cognition and pure judgments of beauty depend on this harmony. Earlier, I argued that an implication of this is that we can only appeal to the presence of the free play itself in order to explain our pleasure in beauty. It is the occurrence of this free play that in itself must be pleasurable to explain our pleasure in beauty. Furthermore, I concluded that in order to prevent Guyer's picture from contradicting the Kantian constraints on the judgment of taste, the possibility of abstraction from our concepts must be allowed. When we abstract from the concepts applied in experience we are able to judge on mere appearance alone, hence to bring about unrestrained cognition—a free play of the faculties.

But now a problem arises. The possibility to abstract from concepts in order to judge freely undermines the very explanatory potential of the free play itself. This is because, as long as we abstract from our conceptualisation to establish unrestricted cognition, on this reading we would be able to find *everything* beautiful. And this clearly conflicts with what Kant holds, not only because he speaks of there being ugly objects, but more directly because he so explicitly affirms the possibility of aesthetic neutrality. We need to explain why abstraction from concepts in our perception of some objects results in judging them to be aesthetically neutral, while with other objects we feel the pleasures of beauty. Simply referring to a free play here is no longer explanatory. The most plausible way to go is to reintroduce a means to qualify the free play.

In fact, Guyer already tends to do this himself, when he explains what happens when we judge beauty. He asserts that it

> must be a feeling that is unified in some way that goes *beyond* the unity that is dictated by whatever determinate concept the object is subsumed under—as it were, an excess of felt unity or harmony. (ibid., p. 149)

And he further speaks of a "*further* degree of unity" (ibid., p. 150). Both statements indicate that the pleasure related to beauty involves not any sort of harmony, but a harmony of a special kind. In other words, the cognitive state underpinning our pure judgments of beauty must not be regarded as an instance of just any co-operation of the faculties, but as one of a rather ideal state of mutual harmony.

It seems that at this point Guyer is in fact not far removed from Allison, who also distinguishes 'ordinary' harmony from instances where there is perfect congruity between our cognitive faculties (Allison 2001, p. 117). Allison does not deny that we can recognise some form of harmony in ordinary cognitive functioning. Yet, we must understand this type of relation between our cognitive faculties in terms of its purest instances. And these purest instances are of course found in a judgment of taste. But they can also be found on one other occasion, in cases where there is no state of free play of our faculties, *viz.* where a concept enters the content of the judgment. Allison stresses that the mutual harmony of our faculties in absence of a free play is most pure in judgments of perfection. In a judgment of perfection "the harmony is based on a determinate concept of the object", Allison explains, "which leaves no scope for the free activity of the imagination" (ibid., p. 117; emphasis added). So we recognise something as perfect when the concept that our understanding applies completely 'fits' the manifold offered by our senses—instantiating a cognitive harmony outside cases of beauty.

If this is correct, ideal harmony thus reveals itself on two occasions: (i) in pure beauty, where understanding in general harmonises with unrestricted imagination, and (ii) in perfection, when a concept is able to fully restrain operative imagination. And the distinction between ideal states of harmony and 'common' harmonious functioning implies that cognitive harmony will come in degrees. Its essence, or principle, is to be found in ideal states of 'maximal co-operation', and further down the line it will be contaminated by mismatches in experience. It is no more than natural to place a disharmony at the opposing logical extreme, so that common cognition will form an aesthetically neutral midpoint, nicely paralleling Kant's three-valued logic.

Precisely this gradual model justifies Guyer's explications in terms of 'further degrees of unity', by which he simply indicates that in judgments of beauty the cognitive harmony is close to ideal. Moreover, as I have argued, he must necessarily embrace such a model to be able to sufficiently qualify the free play involved in beauty; a qualification that is necessary in order to prevent the unwelcome outcome of ubiquitous beauty. This leads to the further conclusion that Guyer's Epistemic Requirement for the necessity of a harmony must be weakened in order to be consistent with Kant's theory. What is required in this weakened version is at minimum a functional co-operation of understanding and imagination, though the free interplay still allows for especially pleasurable instances aptly described in Kant's third *Critique* as 'harmonious'.

4.2 The cognitive impossibility of pure disharmony

Nevertheless, even in its weakened form Guyer's Epistemic Requirement affects Allison's thesis. Recall, Allison defends that Kant allows for a *pure* reflective aesthetic judgment of ugliness. For such a negative reflective judgment to be pure, the interplay of the faculties needs to be fully free. But if this free play is subsequently qualified as disharmonious in order to explain the displeasure involved in ugliness, as Allison does, he is committed to a *pure state* of disharmony as well. This might not be directly obvious. But we must realise that it is a plain consequence of Allison's pursuit of purity that only disharmony in its purest form can ground the negative judgment of taste. What is implied here is the extreme pole of the three-valued model, so that wherever there remains the logical possibility of a maximally disharmonious state only that state forms the principle of a pure reflective aesthetic judgment of ugliness.

The problem for any model that wishes to account for negative judgments of taste in terms of disharmony is that, in the purely disharmonious instances of cognition that such model describes, cognition itself inevitably breaks down. It would be *ad hoc* to explicate a pure disharmony both as an insuperable hindrance of the faculties, while at the same time they are co-operating. So, even when the Epistemic Requirement is weakened, Guyer is still able to maintain that a *logical* possibility of pure judgments of ugliness does not imply the required *cognitive* possibility. A free state of disharmony provides an incoherent model for ugliness. It must be concluded that if we look for a *pure* Kantian judgment based on a disharmony of the faculties, these objections block any attempt.

5 The disharmony restrained

Still, this does not rule out all possibilities for disharmony. Indeed as long as we take into account the more nuanced way Kant conceived of ugliness, I argued, there is no clear reason why we would demand a pure judgment of ugliness. Although the kind of disharmony Allison envisages turned out to be cognitively impossible, we can still formulate a more modest proposal: in light of the previous we can construct an argument for a reflective aesthetic judgment of ugliness that is not pure, but adherent.

This proposal bases itself on the possibility of a relative disharmony. It agrees with Guyer that, although a pure disharmony is a *logical* possibility, this conceptual point does not establish the real possibility of an "insuperable disharmony between imagination and understanding" (Guyer 2005, p. 146n). But it also agrees with Allison that there is a genuine sense in which the dishar-

monious interplay of the faculties can displease in reflective aesthetic judgments.

Earlier I noted that Kant recognised a class of adherent reflective aesthetic judgments that are impure because in such judgments the freedom of imagination is restricted by a concept of the object. I noted that it is essential to such adherent judgments that we judge how an object appears to us *as* an x. This concept involved is part of the content of the judgment, so on the semantic reading adopted such judgments are clearly impure. The imaginative *representation* of the object can be related with an understanding of how such an *object* should represent itself to us, according to the concept we have of it. Kant states this 'theory' of adherent beauty very briefly in the sixteenth section of his third *Critique*, which conveys that,

> the beauty of a human being [...], the beauty of a horse, of a building [...] presuppose a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection, and is thus merely adherent beauty. (CJ 5:230)

Of course the exact thrust of Kant's extremely sketchy theory of such adherent beauty is controversial. That notwithstanding, my use of it will be compatible with the different readings that have been given of this passage.[6] The crucial and uncontroversial point about adherent judgments we must understand Kant to make, is that in judging an object 'adherently' we presuppose a concept of what the object ought to be, for we compare the representation of the object with a concept we have of the perfection of such an object. And in order to do this, it is necessary to also subsume the object under the same concept, in which according to Kant "imagination, which is as it were at play in the observation of the shape, would merely be restricted" (CJ 5:230).

Now, it was clear that in judging perfection a concept that our understanding applies to an object presented in sense perception completely ‘fits’ the object as imagination presents it. As a corollary, there is no scope for any free activity of imagination itself. But not so when we judge adherent beauty: indeed, also here a concept restrains imagination, but precisely because adherent beauty is still a *reflective* aesthetic judgment—it is still beauty—there is always some room for imagination to make an extra contribution that is not part of the concept we have of the object itself.

Any understanding of adherent beauty rests on the fact that also the freedom of imagination comes by degrees. On the one hand, if imagination were fully free a judgment would be pure, while on the other, as Allison described, imagination can also be fully restrained in this freedom, in which case it grounds the practical aesthetic judgment of perfection.[7] In between lie both

ordinary cognition and adherent beauty. Given this, a difference must be accounted for: there is no remarkable pleasure in ordinary recognition of an object as a chair, while judging a species of rose beautiful precisely because it is a rose certainly brings us pleasure. So, it must be asked: what explains the specific pleasure we have in adherent beauty?

The answer is that since it is for Kant still a form of beauty, this explanation must be a qualification of the free interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding—which is now a relatively free interplay, of course. Also in the case of adherent beauty Kant takes it that in 'comparing' the representation with a concept (with how it ought to be) "we cannot avoid at the same time holding it together with the subject," and so we make a reflective judgment in which, as Kant puts it, "the *entire faculty* of the powers of representation gains if both states of mind are in agreement" (CJ 5:231). And such agreement can only be a state of harmony—although in contrast with pure beauty it does not have to be maximal. Moreover, it *cannot* even be maximal due to understanding's restrictive conceptualisation.

What is crucial to recognise here is that in these adherent reflective judgments a state of *disharmony* can be realised without this leading to any epistemic problems. This is because in such an adherent judgment we appraise the interplay between imagination restricted by a concept, and understanding of the end carried with this concept. This way, a minimal degree of co-operation is already a precondition for adherent judgments in general. If now the relatively free interplay involved in a particular range of these judgments would be disharmonious, this disharmony itself can again only be relative. It would mean that imagination, in the degree of freedom left for it, hinders the application of the concept to a particular object, even though understanding has correctly recognised the object as fitting the concept.

Consider an illustrative case. You apply a determinate concept to a particular object, simply in recognising it, for example, as a face. But in doing so you judge, reflectively, that though this object has been, and should have been subsumed under this concept, it still leaves scope for free activity of the imagination in representing the object. More precisely, this 'excess' of unrestricted activity of imagination, regarded in light of the concept understanding has of how faces should look, hinders rather than helps the subsumption that takes place. Such interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding here is relatively disharmonious, and a poor instance of the co-operation in common cognition. A displeasure is felt due to this state. You now have reflectively judged the object to be ugly.

Consequently, a disharmonious interplay of the faculties of imagination and understanding can indeed be the source of displeasure in a reflective aes-

thetic judgment. It results not in a *pure* reflective judgment, and no universal communicability or universal validity is demanded. Yet, I have argued why this is so, and why there is neither a possibility nor a need for such a judgment to be pure. This is Kant's understanding of how things displease 'by the look of them', and this makes it possible to conclude that he can indeed account for a reflective aesthetic of ugliness.

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Notes

[1] All references to Kant are to the standard pagination of the *Akademieausgabe*. Throughout the paper I use the following title-abbreviations:

AP *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Trans. R. B. Louden. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2006.

CJ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. P. Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2000.

CR *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. N. K. Smith. New York: Palgrave. 2007.

FI "First Introduction". Trans. P. Guyer. In: [CJ].

LP "Logik Philippi". In: *Gesammelte Schriften XXIV: Vorlesungen �ber Logik*. Vol. IV/I. 303�496. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. 1966.

MV "Metaphysik Vigilantius�". Trans. K. Ameriks and S. Naragon. In: K. Ameriks and S. Naragon (eds). *Lectures on Metaphysics*. 417�506. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1997.

NF *Notes and Fragments*. Trans. P. Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005.

[2]Strictly, Kant's theory is modality-neutral. Here I limit myself to examples of visual ugliness, but I take my conclusions to be sufficiently general to equally apply to other senses. Our common conception of auditory ugliness, I suppose, would be one of something's 'sounding nasty'. I do, however, believe that our intuitions are strongest in the visual cases, and I further doubt whether there is such a thing as olfactory or gustatory ugliness, or a kind of ugliness that belongs to the skin senses.

[3]"Häßlichkeit ist also was positives, nicht eine blosse Abwesenheit der Schönheit sondern auch das Daseyn dessen, was der Schönheit zuwider ist." The translation is my own.

[4]The object judged can be called the 'objective source'. If I judge a flower, this organism now is the objective source of the pleasure I feel. Yet this source is too specific to individuate judgment-types, as different objective sources (rainbows, foliage) can all lead to the same type of judgment. Unqualified occurrences of 'source of pleasure' will in what follows solely denote the subjective source.

[5]This is why the debate about ugliness in Kant is crucial: the judgment he finds justification for must exist to be of use. It would be inadmissible for Kant to just concoct the required pure judgment out of the blue—this would lead to an *ad hoc* foundation, only introduced to save a theory. So it is paramount that judgments of taste have an actual place in our lives. Kant thinks this is warranted, given that most of our everyday beauty is recognised in adherent reflective judgments. Pure reflective judgments of taste, then, belong to the same species as our everyday judgments. Yet, a corollary of this is that if we consider ugliness to be a genuine dimension to our 'ordinary' aesthetic judgments as well, Kant's theory must be able to incorporate ugliness. When a proper understanding of the phenomenon of ugliness in Kantian terms leads to a contradiction, this would be devastating for the very *raison d'être* of the third *Critique*.

[6]In fact, according to Guyer the different readings of the passage do not even conflict, but must be considered as different implications of "Kant's all too brief but actually quite rich account" (Guyer 2005, p. 135).

[7]This reading helps to understand why Kant states that "Strictly speaking, however, perfection does not gain by beauty, nor does beauty gain by perfection," for they simply rule each other out as contraries on this scale of imaginative freedom (CJ 5:231).