

## KANT AND THE PURITY OF THE UGLY

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Kant opens the “Analytic of the Beautiful” of the “Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment” with the statement that “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” (*CPJ*, §1, 5:203).<sup>1</sup> Kant then argues that a pleasure in objects that is free of any admixture of pleasure in their merely sensory agreeableness or their prudential or moral goodness is the ground for an affirmative judgment of their beauty, so it seems plausible to suppose that he also means to assert that there is a distinctive displeasure, free of any displeasure in an object’s sensory disagreeableness or prudential or moral badness, on which a negative but still purely aesthetic judgment that such an object is ugly rather than beautiful must be based. A number of recent authors have therefore argued that Kant’s aesthetic theory must include an account of a purely aesthetic experience and judgment of ugliness as well as beauty. For example, Hud Hudson has argued that it must be possible to reconstruct an “Analytic of the Ugly” to accompany the “Analytic of the Beautiful,”<sup>2</sup> in which judgments of ugliness, like judgments of beauty, can be shown to be disinterested and yet universally and necessarily valid, and Henry Allison has gone so far as to assert that the “inclusion of space” for “negative judgments of taste” is “criterial for the adequacy of an interpretation of Kant’s theory of taste,” because “negative judgments must have the same status (as judgments of taste) and

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<sup>1</sup> All citations to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* will be drawn from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Citations will be located by the abbreviation “*CPJ*” followed by Kant’s section number and the volume and page number of the passage in *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian (later German and then Berlin-Brandenburg) Academy of Sciences (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter, 1900--). Citations to other passages in Kant will be located by volume and page number in this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Hud Hudson, “The Significance of an Analytic of the Ugly in Kant’s Deduction of Pure Judgments of Taste,” in Ralf Meerbote, ed., and Hud Hudson, associate ed., *Kant’s Aesthetics, North American Kant Society Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1991), pp. 87-103.

the same claim to validity as their positive counterparts.”<sup>3</sup> However, Kant himself does not explicitly identify the judgment that an object is not beautiful with the judgment that it is ugly, or give any explicit account of a purely aesthetic experience of displeasure on which a judgment of ugliness could be based; indeed, he does not discuss any form of ugliness at all in the “Analytic of the Beautiful,” mentioning ugliness only much later, in his discussion of fine art, when he maintains that there can be beautiful artistic representations of “things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing,” such as “the furies, diseases, devastations of war, and the like” (*CPJ*, §48, 5:312). This fact has led some authors, such as Reinhard Brandt and Miles Rind, to argue that Kant does not hold judgments of ugliness to be pure aesthetic judgments,<sup>4</sup> and has even led one author to imply, at least by his title, that “Kant finds nothing ugly.”<sup>5</sup> The last thought certainly goes too far: of course Kant finds some things ugly, for example, the furies, diseases, and the devastations of war. But I agree with Brandt and Rind that for Kant the judgment that an object is ugly is not a pure aesthetic judgment, as indeed these examples of things that are ugly because they are disagreeable or morally offensive strongly suggest. In this paper, I will explain why Kant cannot hold that judgments of ugliness are pure aesthetic judgments and argue that must instead understand the undeniable experience of ugliness as an impure aesthetic experience. I will also propose that Kant is far more interested in explaining the role of displeasure in the experience of sublimity than in the experience of ugliness, although there too the conclusion that the experience and judgment of sublimity is impure rather than pure is strongly suggested.

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<sup>3</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 54, 71. The arguments of Allison and Hudson were preceded by Christian Strube, “Das Häßliche und die ‘Kritik der ästhetischen Urteilskraft’: Überlegungen zu einer systematischen Lücke,” *Kant-Studien* 80 (1989): 416-46.

<sup>4</sup> See Reinhard Brandt, “Die Schönheit der Kristallen und das Spiel der Erkenntniskräfte. Zum Gegenstand und zur Logik des ästhetischen Urteils bei Kant,” in Reinhard Brandt and Werner Stark, eds., *Autographen, Dokumente und Berichte: Zu Edition, Amtsgeschäften und Werk Immanuel Kants, Kant-Forschungen*, vol. 5 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1994), pp. 19-57, and Miles Rind, “Can Kant’s Deduction of Judgments of Taste Be Saved?,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 84 (2001): 20-45. Brandt emphasizes that in spite of his references to the “feeling of pleasure and displeasure” Kant never actually discusses the case of the ugly or the feeling of displeasure as a distinct case of feeling, so it is better to understand his conjunctive references as references to our capacity to feel pleasure or displeasure, which however feels only pleasure in its purely aesthetic use. This is no doubt right, but does not address the fundamental issue of why Kant cannot allow a purely aesthetic experience of the ugly. Rind recognizes, as I will also argue, that Kant’s basic theory of the harmony of the faculties excludes the possibility that the experience of ugliness is a purely aesthetic response, and therefore that our experience of displeasure in the case of ugliness necessarily “arises from some other source” (p. 29). But he also thinks that the free play of the faculties is present the experience of every object, thus that every object is beautiful to some degree, though of course some are more so than others, and that ugly objects are ones in which the displeasure from “some other source” drowns out whatever degree of beauty the object happens to have. This fails to recognize the possibility of aesthetic indifference that, as we will see in the next section, Kant clearly held.

<sup>5</sup> David Shier, “Why Kant Finds Nothing Ugly,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38 (1998): 412-18.

## I. AESTHETIC TRIVALENCE

The first thing that must be said in any discussion of this issue is that we do not need any feeling of displeasure and judgment of ugliness at all in order to judge that something is not beautiful. As a number of participants on both sides of this debate have observed, Kant holds that pleasure and pain (or positive displeasure) are extremes between which lies the neutral state of feeling neither pleasure nor pain, and he correspondingly holds, although he does not mention this in the third *Critique*, that beauty and ugliness are extremes between which lies the aesthetically indifferent. Kant makes this point as early as his 1763 essay on the *Attempt to introduce the concept of negative magnitudes into philosophy*, where he argues that displeasure is not simply “the lack of pleasure,” but “indeed something positive in itself and not merely the contradictory opposite of pleasure,” something that is “more than a mere negation” (2:180).<sup>6</sup> But this means that a predicate such as “beautiful” that may be asserted of an object only on the basis of a feeling of pleasure induced by that object can be withheld from an object when it fails to produce a feeling of either pleasure or displeasure as well as when it produces an actual feeling of displeasure, and thus that an object may fail to be beautiful when it is aesthetically indifferent as well as when it is actually painful and ugly. Kant makes this explicit in a variety of places. In several reflections, he observes that there are three aesthetic categories, not two: using the symbolism of the essay on *Negative Magnitudes*, one note characterizes pleasure (*Lust*) as “A,” indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) as “non A,” and displeasure (*Unlust*) as “- A,” and then presents the “beautiful, the ordinary, and the ugly” (*schön, alltäglich, häßlich*) as a trichotomy expressing these three possibilities, along with similar trichotomies such as “good, valueless, evil” and “esteem, disregard, contempt” (*Achtung, Gringschätzung, Verachtung*) (R 669, 15:196-7). Another note simply lists “beautiful +; not-beautiful (dry) 0; ugly - “as three alternative aesthetic predicates.<sup>7</sup> These trichotomies mean that objects can be denied to be beautiful when they are “ordinary” or “indifferent” and produce no feeling of pleasure or displeasure at all, as well as when they are actually ugly and produce a feeling of actual displeasure. Thus we do not need a feeling of displeasure, let alone a purely aesthetic feeling of displeasure, in order to make the negative judgment that something is not beautiful – which is the only form of negative aesthetic judgment that Kant actually mentions in the opening statement of the “Analytic of the Beautiful.” Kant also notes that a judgment of ugliness is not the only alternative in his lectures on logic and metaphysics. Thus, although he states in the 1772 *Logik Philippi* that “Ugliness is...something positive, not a mere lack of beauty, rather the existence of

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<sup>6</sup> This passage has been cited by Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, p. 71, as well as by Christian Wenzel, “Kant Finds Nothing Ugly?”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39 (1999): 416-22.

<sup>7</sup> These passages are cited by Wenzel, “Kant Finds Nothing Beautiful?”, p. 418, as well as Strube, “Das Häßliche,” p. 421.

something contrary to beauty” (24:364),<sup>8</sup> he also states in the 1789 *Logik Pölitz* that “To distinguish the beautiful from that which is not beautiful (not from that which is ugly, because that which is not beautiful is not always ugly) is taste” (24:514).<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in the late (1794-5) *Metaphysik Vigilantius*, he holds that “That which pleases through mere intuition is *beautiful*, that which leaves me indifferent in intuition, although it can please or displease, is *non-beautiful*; that which displeases me in intuition is ugly. Now on this pleasure rests the *concept of taste*” (29:1010).<sup>10</sup> These passages make it clear that Kant realizes that although whatever feeling of displeasure it is that leads us to call something ugly will certainly require us to refrain from judging it to be beautiful, we do not need such a positive feeling of aversion in order to refrain from a judgment of beauty; mere indifference will suffice for that. Thus it is by no means clear that he thinks that a theory of taste requires a purely aesthetic feeling of ugliness in order to explain the possibility of negative judgments of taste, that is, verdicts of “not beautiful”; indeed, the passage from the *Metaphysik Vigilantius* states that the concept of taste is founded only on “this pleasure,” leaving open the possibility that the aesthetic judgment of whether something is beautiful or not can be founded simply on the presence or absence of a single purely aesthetic feeling, namely, the pleasure in beauty.

However, to say just that is to be too short with this interesting passage, which suggests two further points. First, the passage suggests that we can judge something to be not beautiful when the *mere intuition* of it leaves us indifferent, even if we have *other reasons* to be pleased or displeased with it. This need not mean that there is a special form of purely aesthetic indifference in mere intuition, but could mean that we can recognize the absence of the distinctively aesthetic pleasure that we would take in the mere intuition of a beautiful object even in the case where we have some other reason for being either pleased or displeased with an object. But, second, when Kant goes on to state that what displeases *in intuition* is ugly, there he might seem to suggest after all that there must be a purely aesthetic form of displeasure on which judgments of ugliness are based. If that were so, then, even though not all negative judgments of taste need to be based on such a distinctive form of displeasure, because some or perhaps even most are based on mere indifference, nevertheless some negative judgments, namely judgments of ugliness, would have to be based on a distinctively aesthetic displeasure. Kant’s trichotomy would then appear to imply that judgments of beauty are based on a positive purely aesthetic response, judgments of

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<sup>8</sup> Cited by Wenzel, “Kant Finds Nothing Beautiful?,” p. 418.

<sup>9</sup> Cited by Strube, “Das Häßliche,” p. 417.

<sup>10</sup> Translation from Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, tr. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 480. This passage is partially cited by Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste*, p. 72.

indifference or ordinariness on the absence of any aesthetic response whatever, and judgments of ugliness on a negative but also purely aesthetic response.

## II. THE HARMONY OF THE FACULTIES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF UGLINESS

This must be how Allison understands Kant's trichotomy, since he cites it in support of his view that Kant does countenance a purely aesthetic response to ugliness. But when we consider Kant's account of the basis of a positive purely aesthetic response – that is, his explanation of our pleasure in beauty – we must realize that it leaves no room for a negative but purely aesthetic response. Kant's account of our pleasure in beauty is, of course, that such pleasure is the result of a "mutual subjective correspondence" or "play" (*CPJ*, §9, 5:218) between the cognitive powers of imagination and understanding that occurs in response to the representation of an object but "is not grounded on any available concept of the object and does not furnish one" (*CPJ*, Introduction VII, 5:190). It is, in other words, a harmony between imagination and understanding achieved without appeal to any concept of the object. There would then seem to be two alternatives to such a state of mind: the representation of an object might lead to a harmony between imagination and understanding, but only with the assistance of a determinate concept of the object; or engagement with the representation of an object might not lead to any harmony between imagination and understanding at all, but only to a disharmony between them. The first of these alternatives would seem to be what takes place in the vast number of cases of ordinary cognition of aesthetically indifferent objects, where the manifold of our representations of such objects are unified by determinate concepts of those objects without any noticeable free play of our faculties and therefore without any particular pleasure. The second alternative, however, might be thought to be what occurs in the experience of something ugly, where the engagement of our cognitive powers with the object does not lead to any harmony at all, with or without the benefit of a concept of the object. Precisely in order to make room for this last possibility, Allison insists that the concept of the free play of the cognitive faculties must not be regarded as identical to the concept of their harmony: only if these concepts are separated will the idea of a free play that ends in disharmony rather than harmony make sense.<sup>11</sup> What Allison fails to consider, however, is that even if the concepts of free play and harmony are distinguished, so that it is not analytically true that all free play must result in harmony and therefore that the only pure aesthetic response to objects must be our pleasure in their beauty, that conceptual point does not suffice to establish the possibility that any engagement of the cognitive faculties with an object could result in an insuperable disharmony between imagination and understanding. In fact, this possibility is blocked, not

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<sup>11</sup> Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, pp. 116-17.

by the meaning of the concepts of free play and harmony, but by the entire epistemology of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The first *Critique* argues that it is possible for me to attach the “I think” to any representation that I have, or to include any representation in the transcendental unity of my apperception; that including any representation in the transcendental unity of my apperception requires the application of one or more of the categories or pure concepts of the understanding to it; but that the pure concepts of the understanding are in fact nothing but the forms of determinate empirical concepts, just as the pure forms of intuition are nothing but the forms of empirical intuitions, so that the application of the categories to all the objects of my representation also requires the application of determinate empirical concepts to all of them (for example, the category of substance can only be applied to empirical intuition through the empirical concept of matter, and the concept of causation through the empirical concept of a rule-governed change in motion). But these premises entail that we can never be conscious of a representation at all, *a fortiori* of a representation of an object, without the application of some determinate empirical concept to it. And if the application of a concept to a manifold brings the faculty of understanding into harmony with a manifold of sensibility reproduced by the imagination, this means we cannot be conscious of an object without some form of harmony between understanding and imagination, although such a harmony will in this case not be a free play of the faculties. This in turn is to say that for Kant there are really only two possible relations between imagination and understanding in the experience of any object: a state of free play between them 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; or a harmony between them that does depend upon such concepts. A state of sheer disharmony between them is not consistent with the transcendental unity of apperception. A free play of our cognitive powers that results in a disharmony between them is not a logical impossibility, just as Allison maintains; but it is an epistemological impossibility on Kant’s fundamental theory of human consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

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. This simple statement naturally raises as many questions as it answers. One question, of course, is: if it is so obvious that there cannot be a purely aesthetic response of disharmony to ugliness, why have so many careful interpreters of Kant failed to see this? A second

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<sup>12</sup> Both Dieter Lohmar, in “Das Geschmacksurteil über das faszinierend Hässliche,” in Herman Parret, ed, *Kants Ästhetik – Kant’s Aesthetics --L’esthétique de Kant* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 498-512) and Christian Wenzel, in “Kant Finds Nothing Ugly?”, base their arguments that Kant does countenance a purely aesthetic response to ugliness on the claim that a disharmonious free play of the cognitive powers isn’t necessarily self-terminating, and that there is therefore, as it were, time enough for a pure aesthetic response to ugliness. But neither considers that it is Kant’s fundamental epistemology that blocks the possibility of a fundamentally unharmonious relation of the cognitive powers from the outset.

question is: if our experience of any object always involves the subsumption of an empirical manifold of intuition under a determinate empirical concept formed in accordance with a pure concept of the understanding, how can there ever be any free play of imagination and understanding *without* a concept, that is, any experience of beauty? And finally, while Kant's epistemology of ordinary cognition and of aesthetic experience may preclude any purely aesthetic experience of ugliness, surely there is such a thing as ugliness, so how can Kant understand ugliness?

The answer to my first two questions requires a fuller discussion of Kant's central idea of the free play of imagination and understanding than I have given thus far. This idea is notoriously slippery, and there are a number of different interpretations of it in the literature, all, I believe, reasonably suggested by different things that Kant says in attempting to expound his thought. We might classify these interpretations as "precognitive," "paracognitive," and "metacognitive." On the precognitive interpretation, the harmony of the faculties occurs when our experience of an object feels as if it satisfies our underlying demand for cognition even when it also feels as if it satisfies only the conditions for cognition short of the application of a concept to the object but not that last condition. This sort of interpretation is perhaps most strongly suggested in the "First Introduction" to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where Kant writes that

In the power of judgment understanding and imagination are considered in relation to each other, and this can, to be sure, first be considered objectively, as belonging to cognition (as happened in the transcendental schematism of the power of judgment); but one can also consider this relation of two faculties of cognition merely subjectively, insofar as one helps or hinders the other in the very same representation and thereby affects the **state of mind**,

and then goes on that

A merely **reflecting** judgment about a given object...**can be aesthetic** if (before its comparison with others is seen), the power of judgment, which has no concept ready for the given intuition, holds the imagination (merely in the apprehension of the object) together with the understanding (in the presentation of a concept in general) and perceives a relation of the two faculties of cognition which constitutes the subjective, merely sensitive condition of the objective use of the power of judgment in general (namely, the agreement of those two faculties with each other). (*FI*, 20:223-4)

Such passages suggest that the harmony of the faculties takes place when all the subjective conditions of cognition are satisfied but the objective condition of cognition – namely, the subsumption of the representation of an object under a determinate concept of that object – is not. Such a state might further be interpreted as resulting from a process of reflection on or free play with the manifold of representation afforded by an object that

comes to a sense or unity or harmony *prior* to the application of any determinate concept to that manifold – Kant suggests this when he writes, in the section that lays the foundation for the deduction of judgments of taste in the main body of the third *Critique*, that in the state of free play of imagination and understanding, “since no concept of the object is here the ground of the judgment, it can consist only in the subsumption of the imagination itself (in the case of a representation by means of which an object is given) under the condition that the understanding in general advance from intuition to concepts” (*CPJ*, §35, 5:287). That is why I call such an interpretation a “precognitive” interpretation.

By a “paracognitive,” or perhaps better a “multicognitive” interpretation of the harmony of the faculties, I mean one that understands it as a condition in which it seems to us as if we are simultaneously cognizing the object on a number of different tracks, that is, under a number of different concepts, any of which seems to provide a sense of unity to our manifold of representation although none of which seems to apply to it definitely and conclusively. Allison promotes such an interpretation when he writes that the “basic idea” of the “reciprocal quickening” of imagination and understanding “is presumably that the imagination in its free play stimulates the understanding by occasioning it to entertain fresh conceptual possibilities, while, conversely, the imagination, under the general direction of the understanding, strives to conceive new patterns of order.”<sup>13</sup> The central thought here is that the free play of the faculties is like cognition insofar as the understanding entertains a variety of concepts under which its object might be subsumed, but unlike cognition in that it never commits itself to the subsumption of the object under a single one of these concepts.<sup>14</sup> And Kant himself does seem to suggest such an interpretation in a number of passages in which he writes as if the harmony of the faculties involves the subsumption of the manifold of representation afforded by the beautiful object under *some* concept but where it is indeterminate *which* concept that is. A *locus classicus* for this interpretation can also be found in the “First Introduction,” where Kant writes that

If, then, the form of a given object in empirical intuition is so constituted that the **apprehension** of its manifold in the imagination agrees with the **presentation** of a concept of the understanding (though which concept be undetermined), then in the mere reflection understanding and imagination mutually agree for the advancement of their business, and the object will be perceived as purposive merely for the power of judgment... (*FI*, VII, 20:220-1).

But this interpretation could also be taken to be suggested at key points in the published text of the third *Critique*, for instance in §9, the “key to the critique of taste,”

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<sup>13</sup> Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste*, p. 171.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to Allison, Fred L. Rush has also proposed this view in “The Harmony of the Faculties,” *Kant-Studien*....



when Kant writes that in the experience of beauty “The powers of representation 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” (*CPJ*, §9, 5:217). Such passages seem to allow for the possibility that free play consists in playing with multiple concepts for comprehending the object without commitment to any single one of them.

Finally, by a “metacognitive” interpretation of the free play or harmony of the faculties, I mean one that recognizes that 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, the phenomenological character of which might then be captured by one of the metaphors that has led to the first two interpretations. It is not easy to lift from its context any single statement that clearly suggests such an interpretation, but every one of Kant’s *examples* of an object that we judge to be beautiful makes it clear that he assumes that we typically know perfectly well what sort of object the thing is, thus subsume it under some determinate concept, and indeed have to do so in order to be able to refer our experience to a particular object and to make a particular judgment of taste at all, but at the same time experience it as having a degree of unity or inducing a harmony between our imagination and understanding that cannot be traced to that concept, or is not determined by it. Thus, we recognize that a beautiful object is a bird, indeed a parrot, a hummingbird, or a bird of paradise, and must do so in order to say “That’s a beautiful bird, or parrot...”, although *what* we find beautiful in the object must be some sort of unity that goes beyond whatever is necessary to classify it as a bird or even as one of these particular species of bird. Even when we judge a design *a la grecque* or “foliage for borders or on wallpaper” (all from *CPJ*, §16, 5:229) to be beautiful, we are certainly recognizing it *as* a design *a la grecque* or foliage in accordance with the concept of such a pattern *as well as* finding it beautiful because of something about its unity or the harmony of cognitive powers that it induces in us that cannot be explained by its satisfaction of the criteria for the application of that determinate concept. Perhaps this is also what Kant is attempting to capture when he insists that the harmony of the faculties is associated with “the form of the object for reflection in general, hence not in any sensation of the object and also without relation to a concept that contains any intention” (*CPJ*, Introduction VII, 5:190), for sensations (such as of color) are often key criteria for our application of determinate concepts to natural objects, and fitness for the satisfaction of particular intentions likewise key criteria for our classification of artifacts, so to say that there is something in the form of an object that pleases us independently of these factors may be a way of saying that the object pleases us because it gives us through its form a sense of unity or harmony that goes beyond whatever

characteristics and connections among them are necessary for it to satisfy the determinate concepts under which we subsume it. But again, if we did not subsume the objects we find beautiful under some determinate concepts, we could not even make particular aesthetic judgments about them: we could not say that it is this parrot rather than that hummingbird that we find beautiful.

Now, this last point is crucial, for it makes it clear that we cannot take the either of the turns of phrase that are the basis of the first two proposed interpretations of the free play of the faculties as the complete characterization of our state of mind when experiencing this aesthetic response. Thus, while we might be tempted to think that we could experience the satisfaction of the subjective conditions of cognition prior to the satisfaction of any objective condition for cognition of an object – that is, the predication of some determinate empirical concept of it – we must realize that in that case we could not be making any judgment of beauty about a particular object at all; in order to do that, we must subsume the object under some determinate concept, yet *also* feel that there is some way in which it satisfies the subjective requirement of harmony in our manifolds of representation that cannot be traced back to that concept. Likewise, while we might be tempted to think that we could experience a free play among possible concepts for an object without determinately subsuming it under any one of them, we must realize that we must be subsuming the object under some determinate concept in order to recognize it as the object of our experience at all, but then experiencing a free yet harmonious and therefore enjoyable play among further concepts that the object suggests to us without determinately instantiating them. In other words, if we are to maintain both our own and Kant's assumption that particular judgments of taste are made about particular objects, then the first two proposed interpretations of the free play of the faculties must be understood only as ways to cash out the third: that is, the idea of a felt satisfaction of the general requirement of unity or of a free play among possible concepts for an object must be taken as descriptions of the way in which we can feel a unity in our experience of an object that goes beyond the unity associated with any of the determinate concepts under which we subsume it in our ordinary cognition of it.

This conclusion then provides the basis for answers to the first two of the three questions that I posed. First, while it might have seemed, as Allison supposes, that if we could have a state of purely aesthetic reflection or free play that does not result in any harmony between imagination and understanding at all, or that does not result in a free play among several possible "fresh conceptual possibilities" for the object, and thus could result in a state that would constitute a purely reflective aesthetic basis for a judgment of ugliness, we can now see that this isn't really possible: for Kant, we can always recognize a particular object of our experience, and any time we can recognize such an object then there must be that degree of unity between imagination and understanding that is necessary for the subsumption of our manifold of representations of the object under a determinate concept,

even if that further degree of unity that might lead us to experience the object as beautiful is lacking. But this is just to say that our experience of an object must always involve a harmony between imagination and understanding with a concept, even if it does not involve a harmony between these two powers that is free of any concept, and thus that while many objects will certainly be aesthetically indifferent, they cannot be felt to be ugly on the basis of any complete absence of harmony in our experience of them. And second, we can now see how the experience of beauty is possible even though every object of our experience is subsumed under one or in fact many determinate concepts: we are capable of experiencing kinds of unity in an object or free play in our representation of it that go beyond those particular unities in virtue of which it satisfies the determinate concepts that we apply to it. That is why we can experience some but by no means all of the objects of our cognition as beautiful.

### III. THE SOURCES OF UGLINESS

But now it might seem as if I have excluded the possibility of ugliness altogether. Yet Kant, like any reasonable person, clearly does find some things ugly – remember the furies, disease, and the devastations of war. How can he find such things ugly if even they must involve some harmony between imagination and understanding, namely that which allows these very concepts to be applied to them? These very examples suggest the answer to this question: judgments of ugliness are not purely reflective aesthetic judgments at all, but are merely sensory or else practical judgments, that is, expressions of our feelings of displeasure at things that are disagreeable in some physiological or psychological way or bad or evil in the light of our prudential or moral practical reason. In Kant's terms, these instances of ugliness contrast with the agreeable or the good, not with the purely aesthetic response to beauty (*CPJ*, §5, 2:209-10). Diseases and injuries produce pain and disfigurement, which we find profoundly disagreeable when we suffer them ourselves, when we fear catching them from others, and when we see others suffering them even if we do not fear infection or similar injuries ourselves. Finding disease and injury disagreeable and their effects ugly is not a purely aesthetic response. The devastations of war produce injuries and disfigurements to persons and their surroundings which are not only disagreeable to our senses but also offensive to our practical judgments and moral sensibilities. Our displeasure at these devastations is not purely aesthetic, but involves response to the disagreeable, the bad, and the evil. As these are the only examples of the ugly that Kant gives, we may at least conjecture that he assumes that all cases of ugliness are to be analyzed as violations of our standards for the agreeable and/or the good, but not as objects of a negative yet purely aesthetic response. The absence of a purely aesthetic response to beauty, then, leads to the

negative aesthetic judgment of ordinariness or indifference, but the negative judgment of ugliness is not based on a purely reflective aesthetic response at all, but on feelings of displeasure at the disagreeable, the imprudent, and the immoral.

How could such an account be reconciled with Kant's statement in the *Metaphysik Vigiliantius* (29:1010) that the ugly is that which displeases *in intuition*? The answer should be as obvious as the question: our response to the ugly is based on our *perception* of the (sufficiently) disagreeable and immoral, and ugliness is the *perceivable expression* of the disagreeable and the immoral (just as the beautiful is, at least sometimes if not always, the expression of aesthetic ideas; see *CPJ*, §51, 5:320). When Kant states that the ugly displeases in intuition, after all, he does not say that the ugly displeases in intuition in a purely free and reflective manner. So that statement does not contradict the explanation of ugliness I have ascribed to Kant, but only claims that the perception of the disagreeable or immoral, as opposed to the mere thought of it, is a necessary condition of the experience of ugliness.

To be sure, Kant apparently does not feel compelled to offer a general account of ugliness at all. He offers his examples of ugliness only in illustration of his (by no means idiosyncratic or original) thesis that "Beautiful art displays its excellence precisely by describing beautifully things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing" (*CPJ*, §48, 5:312). However, the sort of analysis of ugliness that I have just ascribed to him would seem to be necessary to allow for this possibility: if our response to the ugliness of the described or depicted content of a work of art were a negative but purely aesthetic response then, one would think, it would simply cancel out a positive purely aesthetic response to the form or other aesthetically enjoyable properties of the artistic depiction or description, leading to a state of aesthetic neutrality, just as the speed of a ship in one direction combined with an equal speed of the current in the other will leave the ship stuck in the same place. But if our responses to the beauty of the depiction on the one hand and the ugliness of what is depicted on the other have fundamentally different sources, then we can understand how we can experience both responses without an inescapable conflict between them.

Of course, that these responses have fundamentally different sources and do not *necessarily* conflict with each other does not mean that they cannot *in fact* conflict with each other, a point that Kant assumes when he continues that "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*]" (*loc. cit.*) Kant does not define this feeling, here or elsewhere in his writings, nor does he give any examples of what would produce it. It would be natural for us to think that he means simply that some things produce such a degree of physical or moral revulsion that we cannot possibly enjoy any aesthetic qualities and artistic merits in the depiction of them, enjoyable as the latter might be in connection with some other content. That is also a perfectly reasonable thing to

believe, and would have been so for Kant. As Hume wrote, the “finer emotions of the mind are of a very tender and delicate nature, and require the concurrence of many favourable circumstances to make them play with facility and exactness, according to their general and established principles,”<sup>15</sup> and Kant could certainly have believed that the conditions for the occurrence of the free play of imagination and understanding “are of a very delicate and tender nature,” easily disturbed by intense emotions from other sources, even if in his view there are no “general and established principles” for the occurrence of the response to beauty. But Kant seems to have in mind something more complex than this general point, for although he does not define what he means by “loathing,” he does say this:

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. (*CPJ* §48, 5:312)

This suggests that we do not feel loathing simply when our revulsion at the content of a work of art overwhelms our potential pleasure in its aesthetic merits, but rather that we feel loathing when we feel manipulated *by the artistic representation*, when we feel that the representation – and therefore of course the artist who makes it or other agency of the art-world that may push it on us – is attempting to *impose* pleasure upon us when we would prefer to remain with our feelings of disagreeableness or moral disapproval rather than indulge in the enjoyment of beauty. In other words, loathing, at least as Kant treats it here, may itself be a moral response to an attempt to abridge our freedom through the beautification of that which we feel should not be beautified, rather than a simple aversion, which may but need not be moral in origin, to the ugliness of a content that outstrips the beauty of its depiction. Since the freedom of the imagination is essential to the experience of beauty, indeed so essential that it is in virtue of this freedom that the beautiful can serve as a symbol of the freedom of choice and action that is the central value of morality itself (*CPJ*, §59, 5:353-4), an abridgement of our freedom of response to an object can of course block the free play of imagination that is necessary for the experience of beauty. But this should not be taken to mean that the feeling of loathing is any more a pure aesthetic response than the response to ordinary ugliness is; it seems rather to be a moral response to an attempt to

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<sup>15</sup> David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste,” in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 231-55, at p. 237. Kant was of course familiar with this essay, which appeared in Hume’s *Four Dissertations* in 1757 and was almost immediately translated into German in *Vier Abhandlungen von David Hume* (translated by Friedrich Gabriel Resewitz) (Quedlingburg und Leipzig: Andreas Franz Biesterfeld, 1759), modern reprint, with an introduction by Heiner F. Klemme (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2001).

impose an aesthetic response upon us instead of allowing us the free play of imagination and understanding that is essential to successful aesthetic response.<sup>16</sup>

How convincing is what I have alleged to be Kant's analysis of ugliness, suggested by both his epistemological explanation of our response to beauty and his examples of the ugly, namely that our displeasure in ugliness cannot be a pure aesthetic response, but must instead be our response to that which is disagreeable or immoral? In many cases we surely use the term "ugly" just as Kant suggests, to express our revulsion at that which we find, especially although not exclusively in our fellow humans, unhealthy or sickening, sexually unattractive, or offensive to our moral standards. Thus we find ugly those who are disfigured by disease or injury, those with whom we cannot imagine being intimate, or those whose physical appearance suggests attitudes towards themselves or others that we find morally contemptible – for instance, if we share Kant's attitude towards tattooing (*CPJ*, §16, 5:230), we may find those who have chosen to cover their bodies with tattoos ugly even if we would find the patterns with which they have chosen to cover themselves beautiful in some other context, even in the context of the tattoo artist's pattern-book. As this last example suggests, the physical standards of disagreeableness and moral standards of offensiveness on which our judgments of ugliness are based may be either "natural" or "conventional," and thus our judgments of ugliness may find either widespread or limited acceptance – notably, Kant does not argue that the predicate "ugly," like the predicate "beauty," should be used only when we have a well-founded claim to subjective universal validity.<sup>17</sup>

But aren't there cases of ugliness that do not really reflect responses to disagreeableness or immorality? In the visual arts, for example in some abstract paintings, don't we find some combinations of color downright ugly, just as we might find others quite beautiful: in paintings that consist of little but different regions of color, such as works by Josef Albers or Mark Rothko, can't we find some of their combinations beautiful but others ugly? Kant's response to this counterexample, of course, would be that our response to color as such is never a purely reflective aesthetic response, but is always a merely

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<sup>16</sup> Strube appears to suggest that "loathing" is a purely aesthetic response when he writes that "Ekel" bezeichnet dann eine Art von Geschmacksunlust in einer ästhetischen Beurteilung" ("Das Häßliche," pp. 420-1), although he subsequently argues that there is at least one type of the "ekelhaft" which is not purely aesthetic, and so must be based on some other form of disapprobation (pp. 439-45). This is representative of his basic strategy, which is to reconcile the obviously non-aesthetic character of the examples of the ugly and the loathsome that Kant provides with his own insistence that there must be such a thing as the purely aesthetic ugly and even the purely aesthetic loathsome by distinguishing sub-categories of the ugly and the loathsome, namely the purely aesthetic and the not purely aesthetic. This seems to me to be an invention without any basis in Kant's texts.

<sup>17</sup> Some of the discussion in the literature on Kant on ugliness revolves around the question of whether judgments of ugliness have subjective universal validity; see Hudson, "Analytic of the Ugly," pp. 90 -1; Strube, "Das Häßliche," pp. 432 -5; Brandt, "Die Schönheit der Kristalle," p. 34; and Shier, "Why Kant Finds Nothing Ugly," pp. 414-15. But Kant nowhere says that judgments of ugliness are universally subjectively valid.

physiological response of agreeableness or disagreeableness (*CPJ*, §14, 5:225), so his answer could be that our displeasure in a painting whose combination of colors we find jarring is no more a purely aesthetic response than is our pleasure in one whose combination of colors we like.

But what about cases where ugliness seems to lie in one of the more formal dimensions that Kant insists is always the only proper object of taste: for example, an irregular shape in a visual object where, we should have thought, only a regular shape could be beautiful, or a note or sequence in a musical composition that is violently discordant with the rest?<sup>18</sup> These cases may seem harder to discount. Sometimes, of course, they might just be cases in which our expectations for certain types of works are disappointed or violated: for example, an asymmetry that we might find beautiful in an Art Nouveau building could strike us as hideous in a Renaissance edifice, or a sequence of notes that we might accept in Schönberg might be jarring in a piece by Hayden. But if it is just our preconceived notion of how a certain type of object should look or sound that is being violated, we may not have a pure aesthetic response and judgment at all: at least for Kant, a genuinely aesthetic response must always be a free response to an individual object, and a generalization about what is beautiful in a certain class of objects is not a genuinely aesthetic judgment (*CPJ*, §8, 5:215-16), so our disappointment and displeasure in a particular work's violation of such a generalization would also not be a purely aesthetic response. And no doubt in many cases our judgment that a work is ugly is just an expression of our discomfort at its failure to satisfy our expectations for objects in a certain group rather than the result of a free engagement with that object itself unhampered by preconceptions as to how it ought to be. Here the thought that a judgment of ugliness might not be a pure and therefore free judgment of taste might be a valuable corrective to our no doubt natural tendency to like best that which is most like what we have enjoyed before, and freeing ourselves from our preconceptions may well allow us to appreciate the new kind of beauty that the object does have to offer.

But perhaps there are forms of design or composition which we all dislike apart from any preconceptions about how objects of a certain type or genre should look or sound, even if they violate none of our sensory standards of agreeableness or moral standards of goodness, and even if they can be brought under some concept or other which allows for the unification of the manifold of our experience of them, thereby satisfying Kant's general requirement for the unity of apperception. If there are such cases, then we might have to say that our displeasure in such objects cannot be connected to their resistance to our power of cognition or to our faculty of desire, and so could only be grounded in a purely aesthetic failure of reflective judgment. But for Kant, of course, there are no objects that are literally

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<sup>18</sup> Strube equates the ugly with the 'unformed'; 'Das Häßliche,' p. 420.

unformed – our power to impose the pure forms of intuition on all our experience is enough by itself to guarantee that – and I do not think that those who insist that our displeasure in ugliness must be a pure aesthetic response have produced convincing examples of such cases. Until we have an example of ugliness that can be conclusively demonstrated not to displease us merely by being physically disagreeable or morally offensive or failing to meet our expectations for objects in a certain class, Kant’s approach to ugliness remains at least plausible.

#### IV. DISPLEASURE AND THE SUBLIME

So it looks as if the alternatives to the purely aesthetic pleasure in a free harmony of imagination and understanding that is the basis for judgments of beauty are the absence of pleasure that accompanies the conceptually-determined correspondence between imagination and understanding that is the foundation of ordinary cognition and is the basis for the judgment of aesthetic indifference, and the displeasure that leads us to call something ugly but which is based in sensory disagreeableness or moral disapprobation rather than in any purely aesthetic disposition of reflective judgment. Does this leave any room at all for purely aesthetic displeasure in Kant’s theory? The natural place to look for such room would be in Kant’s account of the experience of the sublime, which Kant describes as including an element of displeasure as well as an element of pleasure, and thus on balance as a ‘negative pleasure’ akin to the mixed feelings of admiration or respect rather than a purely positive pleasure. Thus Kant opens his discussion of the sublime by writing that ‘Since the mind is not merely attracted by the object, but is also always reciprocally repelled by it, the satisfaction in the sublime does not so much contain positive pleasure as it does admiration or respect, i.e., it deserves to be called negative pleasure’ (*CPJ*, §5:245), and he concludes his discussion of the first form of the sublime, the mathematical sublime, by stating that this ‘feeling of the sublime is thus a feeling of displeasure from the inadequacy of the imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude for the estimation by means of reason, and a pleasure that is thereby aroused at the same time from the correspondence of this very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest sensible faculty in comparison with ideas of reason, insofar as striving for them is nevertheless a law for us’ (*CPJ*, §27, 5:247). On a casual reading, it may seem as if what Kant is claiming is this: that our attempt to grasp the magnitude of anything very vast by our ordinary method of reiterating some determinate unit of measurement a denumerable number of times inevitably fails, because we cannot complete an infinite synthesis, and this fact is unpleasant to us; but the very fact that we even attempt to grasp the infinite by this means reveals to us that we have a faculty of pure reason that imposes this task upon us, and this realization is pleasing, so pleasing that the experience on



the whole is pleasing, although in that bittersweet way that Kant attempts to capture by calling it a negative pleasure and comparing it to the feeling of respect. On such an account, the moment of displeasure might seem to be purely aesthetic in nature, arising from a disharmony between the ambition of the imagination and the power of the understanding, even if the pleasure that follows might seem to depend too directly on our conception of the demand of our own faculty of reason to be considered independent of any concept and thus purely aesthetic.

Such an interpretation of the experience of the mathematical sublime might seem to threaten the premise of my argument against a purely aesthetic experience of ugliness, because it countenances the possibility of a failure of harmony between the imagination and the understanding, although one that is then compensated by a certain sort of harmony between imagination and reason – and if there could be a straightforward failure of harmony between imagination and understanding in the case of the sublime, why couldn't there also be a pure disharmony between those two faculties in the case of the ugly? But a more careful interpretation of Kant's theory of the mathematical sublime would show that it does not posit any disharmony between imagination and understanding at all. For Kant does not argue that there is any problem in estimating any magnitude by our ordinary means of iterating determinate units. No matter how vast or formless what we perceive may *seem*, nothing that we perceive is actually infinite (this is of course the premise of Kant's resolution of the first two antinomies of pure reason in the first *Critique*); so we can assign a determinate magnitude to anything that we perceive, in a harmonious exercise of both imagination and understanding, by choosing a unit of appropriate size that will allow us to measure the whole in a manageable number of iterations. There is no threat to ordinary cognition in the mathematical sublime. Rather, the moment of displeasure in this experience arises from the attempt at what Kant calls the *aesthetic* "comprehension" of the vast and formless, the attempt to grasp it in something like a *single image* that captures the parts and the whole at the same time, like a single view of one of the great pyramids that would contain a clear differentiation of all its visible parts and yet a clear image of the whole at one and the same time (*CPJ*, §26, 5:252). *This* is something that we may indeed be able to pull off in the case of a pyramid, by standing at the right distance from them, but that we cannot pull off in the case of the vast heavens above or even a vast mountain range such as the Alps or Sierras, and thus the attempt to grasp such an image is bound to fail and hence cause displeasure. But such an attempt is not an effort to measure the magnitude of its object through the cooperation of imagination and understanding, it is rather more like an attempt to grasp this magnitude by the imagination *alone* – that is what it means to call it an attempt at *aesthetic* comprehension. In Kant's words,

Nature is thus sublime in those of its appearances the intuition of which brings with them the idea of its infinity. Now the latter cannot happen except through the inadequacy of even the greatest effort of the our imagination in the estimation of the magnitude of an object. Now, however, the imagination is adequate for the mathematical estimation of every object, that is, for giving an adequate measure for it, because the numerical concepts of the understanding, by means of progression, can make any measure adequate for any given magnitude. Thus it must be the **aesthetic** estimation of the magnitude in which is felt the effort at comprehension which exceeds the capacity of the imagination to comprehend the progressive apprehension in one whole of intuition, and in which is at the same time perceived the inadequacy of this faculty... (CPJ, §26, 5:255)

What redeems this experience from being one of sheer displeasure is then the realization that although the imagination has attempted to *execute* this project of aesthetic comprehension on its own, it did not *undertake* this project on its own, but was rather attempting to do the bidding of reason: “how the mind hears in itself the voice of reason, which requires totality for all given magnitudes, even for those that can never be entirely apprehended although they are (in the sensible representation) judged as entirely given, hence comprehension in **one** intuition” (CPJ, §26, 5:254). The idea of grasping something truly vast “in one intuition,” in other words, was not understanding’s idea, but reason’s idea. Kant’s suggestion then seems to be that once we get over our initial disappointment that imagination cannot carry out the bidding of reason all by itself, we will take pleasure in the very fact that we have a faculty of reason capable of coming up with such a project in the first place. “Thus the inner perception of the inadequacy of any sensible standard for the estimation of magnitude by reason” – not by understanding, mind you – “corresponds with reason’s laws, and is a displeasure that arouses the feeling of our supersensible vocation in us, in accordance with which it is purposive and thus a pleasure to find every standard of sensibility inadequate for the ideas of reason” (CPJ, §27, 5:258).<sup>19</sup>

Kant’s analysis of the experience of the mathematical sublime is probably even more subtle than thus far suggested, because he concludes it by describing this experience as “a feeling that we have pure self-sufficient reason” (CPJ, §27, 5:258), “a feeling of displeasure concerning the aesthetic faculty of judging an object that is yet at the same time represented as purposive, which is possible because the subject’s own incapacity reveals the consciousness of an unlimited capacity of the very same subject, and the mind can aesthetically judge the latter only through the former” (5:259). The remarks that we have a *feeling* of reason’s self-sufficiency and can *aesthetically judge* its capacity through imagination may suggest that we do not simply suffer a failure of imagination which leads us

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<sup>19</sup> The first edition of the third *Critique* has “of reason” ( *der Vernunft*), as translated here; the second edition has “of understanding” ( *des Verstandes*). Given the argument of the preceding section §26, this change in the second edition seems like a mistake.

to the purely conceptual or propositional recognition that imagination is failing at a task set for it by reason, but that we actually have some sort of imaginative representation of the power of reason, or that in this experience we are in a complex imaginative state, which somehow seems to fail to grasp the infinite and yet to grasp it at the same time. Indeed, one could argue that Kant has presupposed this from the outset of his discussion of the sublime: since none of the vast aspects of nature that trigger this experience are *actually* endless or would be recognized by the understanding as such, the very sense that we are seeing something endless or infinite that cannot be comprehended by the imagination must itself be a product of the imagination. Be that as it may, we can stop our analysis of the sublime here: however it plays out, it should be clear by now that the experience of the (mathematical) sublime is not an experience of disharmony between the imagination and understanding, and should not give rise to the thought that there can be such a disharmony in the case of the ugly.

Further, it is far from clear that the experience of the sublime is a *pure* aesthetic experience, a product of reflective judgment alone, at all. The experience of the mathematical sublime seems to depend upon the recognition that we have a faculty of reason; even if we somehow feel this fact, we must also interpret our feeling, connect it to this recognition. This seems even more evident in the case of the dynamical sublime, where the displeasing sense that the forces of nature could cause our physical destruction subsequently leads to pleasure because these forces “allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature” (*CPJ* §28, 5:261). The experience of the might of nature triggers a recognition of our own powers, but a recognition that has to be put into concepts. To be sure, in both cases Kant supposes that we have some sort of *feeling* of our powers, so the experience is aesthetic on that score; and of course he also insists that the ideas of reason – the ideas created by the faculty of reason, but perhaps also the idea of the faculty of reason itself – are indeterminate rather than determinate, because they can never be fully instantiated in experience. So the experience of the sublime in both of its forms clearly involves feelings that are not connected to the subsumption of objects under determinate concepts, and can therefore be counted as genuinely aesthetic. Yet they so centrally involve intellectual content that it seems hard to call them purely aesthetic. In at least one place, Kant does suggest that the “sublime in nature” is the object of a “pure aesthetic judgment” (*CPJ*, §30, 5:279); but he also writes that “a far greater culture, not merely of the aesthetic power of judgment, but also of the cognitive faculties on which that is based, seems to be requisite in order to make a judgment about” the sublime rather than the beautiful, and that “The disposition of the mind to the feeling of the sublime requires its receptivity to ideas” (*CPJ*, §29, 5:264-5). Thus, while Kant himself seems to be ambivalent

about it, his own analysis suggests that we should not take the experience of the sublime as a model for a pure aesthetic experience.

#### V. IS EVEN THE EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY IMPURE?

I conclude, then, that while Kant obviously recognizes the existence of ugliness, he does not hold that our experience of ugliness is a pure aesthetic experience. The ugly is what we find physically disagreeable or morally offensive, and although the latter experiences place limits on the freedom of our imagination in its play with the understanding, they are not themselves pure aesthetic experiences. Further, while there might seem to be place for a purely aesthetic displeasure in the experience of the sublime, this experience does not, as might be thought, involve any disharmony between imagination and understanding that could be an alternative to the harmony between these two faculties that is the core of the experience of beauty, and it is in any case by no means clear that the experience of the sublime in either of its forms is a pure rather than mixed aesthetic experience. So on Kant's theory, only the experience of beauty is a pure aesthetic experience; the experience of the ordinary or indifferent is the simple absence of aesthetic experience, and the experiences of the sublime and the ugly are at best mixed aesthetic experiences.

Does the purity of the experience of beauty and the impurity of the experiences of the ugly and the sublime introduce an intolerable discontinuity into Kant's aesthetic theory? I suggest that the conclusion that the experiences of the ugly and the sublime are not purely free and reflective aesthetic experiences is not only consistent with everything Kant says about those experiences themselves, but also consistent with what he has to say about beauty, for the simple reason that on Kant's account by no means all experiences of beauty are pure aesthetic experiences or experiences of free beauty either – many experiences of beauty, after all, are experiences of adherent beauty connected to a determinate concept of the beautiful object's function (*CPJ*, §16) or artistic beauty connected to the determinate intention of the artist, although in the case of a work of genius in some way going beyond his intention (*CPJ*, §49). These cases of beauty are genuine cases of beauty, because they involve the free play of imagination *with* concepts or *within* the limits set by concepts, but they are not cases of free beauty. Indeed, when Kant concludes that "Beauty (whether it be beauty of nature or of art) can in general be called the **expression** of aesthetic ideas" (*CPJ*, §51, 5:320), he may even be suggesting that there is no such thing as the free experience of beauty at all. Perhaps we come closest to having an experience that is just a harmonious free play of imagination and understanding in the experience of isolated objects of nature such as hummingbirds, crustacea, and crystals, and from such cases we can extrapolate to the simple harmony between imagination and understanding that is a necessary condition of any properly aesthetic experience; but in the end, all of our experiences of such harmony are

also associated with ideas of reason through the intermediary of aesthetic ideas, and thus our experiences of beauty, just like those of the ugly and the sublime, are impure rather than pure. This might be due to our own subjective tendency to read moral significance into every experience that we can, a tendency that certainly underlies Kant's entire argument in the "Critique of Teleological Judgment"; but this would be no objection to Kant's conclusion, for the ability to experience a free play between imagination and understanding is itself a distinctively human tendency that we cannot automatically attribute to any other rational being (should there be such).

To argue that in Kant's view all our experiences of beauty are really mixed rather than pure would hardly be implausible – it would, after all, bring Kant's theory into closer alignment with his great predecessor Moses Mendelssohn, among others, and make his theory less of an anomaly among eighteenth-century aesthetic theories. But it certainly would be the task of another paper. If my reflections on Kant's treatment of the ugly and the sublime have even pointed us in this direction, that will be enough for now.