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AN INTEREST IN THE IMPOSSIBLE

TODD KESSELMAN*

I

Ever since Kant first introduced the notion of disinterested pleasure in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* from 1790, critics have been baffled by the contradictory resonance of the term. Nietzsche, for example, was notoriously unsympathetic to Kant's aesthetic endeavor, since he took Kant to be arguing for a notion of detached and indifferent contemplation and concluded from this that Kant's theory allowed no room for a robust affective engagement with works of art. The idea of pleasure deprived of all interest, for Nietzsche, was all but unintelligible. A number of notable commentators however (e.g., Guyer, Allison, and Zangwill), have sought to defend Kant by claiming that this kind of criticism reflects a basic misunderstanding of his terminology.¹

Allison, for example, argues that disinterested pleasure does not entail that we must be indifferent towards beauty or the kinds of objects that we find beautiful; disinterest merely excludes interests from playing any founding role in an aesthetic judgment.² This view accounts for our investment in beauty by treating it as an interest and then taking this interest to be external to the judgment of taste. In this case, for disinterested aesthetic judgments, it is merely "the determination of aesthetic value that must be independent of interest . . ."³ Thus when Kant says in section two of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* that "[i]n order to play the judge in matters of taste, we must not be in the least biased in favor of [a] thing's existence but must be wholly indifferent about it," this does not prevent us from having all sorts of interests in objects of beauty outside of aesthetic judgments.⁴

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1. For another illuminating critique of Nietzsche's reading of Kantian disinterest, see Chapter 15 of I MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *NIETZSCHE 107*, 107 (David Farrell Krell trans., 1991).

2. Allison writes:

For when all is said and done, we are still left with the simple question of how someone who takes pleasure in beauty can be indifferent to the existence of the objects that are the source of this pleasure. The short answer is that one cannot be indifferent, but that, appearances to the contrary, the disinterestedness thesis does not really require that one be.

HENRY E. ALLISON, *KANT'S THEORY OF TASTE: A READING OF THE CRITIQUE OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENT* 94 (2001).

3. *Id.* at 95.

4. IMMANUEL KANT, *CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT* 205, at 46 (Werner S. Pluhar trans., 1987)

Allison's claim, however, does not adequately address the concerns raised by what I am calling Nietzschean-styled criticisms, since they rest on the premise that pleasure and interest are intrinsically inseparable—to find a thing pleasurable is already to take an interest in it. On this view, even if we accept that an aesthetic judgment is not concerned with the existence of the object being judged, we cannot separate the pleasure that arises through the judgment from an interest. This take on pleasure expresses a certain intuitive connection between our receiving pleasure from a certain activity and our taking an interest in that activity. And from this perspective, Kant's description of disinterest does appear puzzling. How can we make sense of Kant's claim that there is a pleasure that is not already an interest—a disinterested pleasure—without reducing disinterest to *indifference*? That is, how can disinterested pleasure address Nietzsche's criticism that Kantian aesthetic judgments are utterly disjointed from any kind of affective investment in beauty?

The debates surrounding disinterested pleasure in the third *Critique* focus on two central claims: first, that our pleasure in the beautiful is “devoid of all interests” (*ohne alles Interesse*) and, second, that “judgments of taste, of themselves, do not even give rise to any interest[s].”⁵ This second claim is more problematic for commentators because it does not even allow for an external relationship between aesthetic judgments and interests, as proposed by Allison: an interest in the pleasure that arises as a consequence of a pure aesthetic judgment would still be prohibited by this view. For this reason, the second claim is often dismissed as being an error on Kant's part. For example, in his seminal article, *Disinterestedness and Desire in Kant's Aesthetics*, Guyer says that it is not only untenable but “absurd” to claim that “the beauty of an object cannot *engender* a genuine desire or concern for it,” since in fact, “the beauty of an object is one of the best reasons we could have for taking an interest in it”⁶ On the contrary—as Guyer argues at first—Kant's description of aesthetic lingering in section twelve of the *Analytic of the*

[hereinafter KANT, JUDGMENT]. Page references, e.g., 205, are to the *Akademie* edition, with the primed numbers referring to volume 20 and the unprimed numbers referring to volume 5 of the *Akademie* edition. The second page number, e.g., 46, refers to the corresponding page in the 1987 Pluhar edition.

5. *Id.* at 205 n.10, at 46 (“*Aber die Geschmackurteile begründen an sich auch gar kein Interesse.*”).

6. Paul Guyer, *Disinterestedness and Desire in Kant's Aesthetics*, 36 *J. AESTHETICS & ART CRITICISM* 449, 450 (1978).

Beautiful makes it appear as if disinterested pleasure *must* lead to a subsequent interest:

Yet [aesthetic pleasure] does have a causality in it, namely, to keep [us in] the state of [having] the presentation itself, and [to keep] the cognitive powers engaged [in their occupation] without any further aim. We *linger* in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself.⁷

Lingering expresses the idea that the intrinsic causality of the aesthetic judging sustains and reproduces itself, such that the presentation is maintained and our mind continues to be engaged with it. Since we aim to remain in a certain state of pleasurable appreciation subsequent to the original appreciation of beauty, it would appear that disinterested pleasure necessarily produces an interest. This is because our ongoing attention to the presentation seems to entail that the object that is the source of that presentation continues to exist. And this would mean that we are interested in the (ongoing) existence of the object.⁸

However, in an interesting reversal Guyer aims to defend Kant's claim that aesthetic judgments do not directly give rise to interests—at least in part—by showing that aesthetic lingering does not properly constitute an interest. Since in Guyer's view the operative notion of interest in the

7. KANT, JUDGMENT, *supra* note 4, at 222, at 68 (emphasis omitted) (insertions two through five in original). The passage reads as follows:

This pleasure is . . . not practical in any way, neither like the one arising from the pathological basis, agreeableness, nor like the one arising from the intellectual basis, the conceived good. Yet it does have a causality in it, namely, to keep [us in] the state of [having] the presentation itself, and [to keep] the cognitive powers engaged [in their occupation] without any further aim. We *linger* in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself. This is analogous to (though not the same as) the way in which we linger over something charming that, as we present an object, repeatedly arouses attention, [though here] the mind is passive.

Id. (emphasis omitted) (insertions in original).

8. See Guyer, *supra* note 6, at 456. Guyer writes:

[I]f aesthetic response naturally produces a desire for its own preservation, then it is also natural to think of it as leading to a desire for at least the continued existence of its object. For if the existence of a given object is the condition of our having a representation or experience of it, then that existence will be a condition of our enjoying that representation. In that case, the tendency to preserve one's state of mind—the enjoyment—will certainly extend to the condition of that state of mind, or the desire will extend to the existence of the object; for if it is analytically true that to will an end is to will the necessary means to it, then it should also be true that to desire an end is to desire the means to it. But a desire for the continued existence of an object we have found beautiful is certainly one thing we could mean by an interest in the beautiful; thus, the fact that our response to beauty is pleasure must itself lead to an interest in the continued existence of its object.

Id. (citation and footnotes omitted).

Critique of Judgment—where interest is described as a “pleasure in the existence of an object”⁹ is not specific enough to defend Kantian disinterest against this apparent contradiction—Guyer instead turns to the account of interest offered in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. In this earlier text,

an interest is not itself a feeling of pleasure, but rather a kind of concept of an object. . . . An interest in an object is only present when there is a concept of it, by means of which pleasure or the expectation of pleasure can be linked to it. . . . The disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment thus does not entail a total separation of aesthetic pleasure and desire, but only the independence of pleasure in beautiful objects from desires that can be attached to determinate general concepts.¹⁰

Once the notion of interest is defined practically, that is, as having a necessary relation to concepts, there is no longer a direct connection between the self-preservative character of disinterested pleasure as lingering and the preserved existence of the object as the condition for that lingering. The connection between our investment in aesthetic pleasure and its necessary condition is severed because that investment is pre-conceptual. It is only within the practical domain, where desires are conceptualized and taken up as reflectively endorsed (*billigen* or *gebilligt*) reasons for action that one can move from an investment in some object, state, or action to the necessary conditions for its realization. For this reason, Guyer uses the term “desire” in order to distinguish between our aesthetic investments and our practical investments—that is, between our aesthetic “interests” and interests proper. Practical desires are interests; they are conceptualized and reflectively endorsed. Aesthetic desires are “*dis-interests*,” so to speak; they are either not yet conceptualized, or are perhaps intrinsically unconceptualizable. As a result of this distinction, and by introducing the term “desire,” Guyer provides us with a means with which we can speak about our investments in beauty, without contradicting the tenets of disinterestedness.

Guyer’s solution to the interest-disinterest problem begins to address the concerns of what I have been calling Nietzschean-styled criticisms

9. KANT, JUDGMENT, *supra* note 4, at 296, at 163 (emphasis omitted).

10. Guyer, *supra* note 6, at 457–58. “[W]hat pleasure in the beautiful must be separated from its existence itself, but the kinds of judgments we typically make about the existence of objects. Such judgments, as well as any pleasures they generate, require the application of determinate concepts to their objects.” *Id.* at 458.

because it provides the conceptual coordinates to otherwise name disinterestedness. Disinterestedness *is* aesthetic desire. Guyer thus shows how we can speak about disinterested pleasure as something other than indifference. But while Guyer's overall strategy is compelling, it fails to address another side of the debates about Kantian disinterest: the separation of aesthetic desires from interests is not sufficient for distinguishing between aesthetic pleasures and agreeable pleasures.

How can aesthetic desire provide an account of disinterested pleasure that is not reducible to *sensuous* pleasure or what Kant calls *das Wohlgefallen am Angenehman*, a liking for the agreeable?¹¹ While Guyer's interest-desire distinction makes it clear that disinterestedness is non-conceptual, it does not explain how aesthetic desire is not merely sensuous. It therefore needs to be supplemented by an account where aesthetic pleasure is at once an embodied *feeling* of pleasure and a desire for that feeling, without at the same time operating according to the kind of causality that we find in the agreeable and which also constrains the freedom of the imagination. For example, when Guyer speaks of aesthetic desire, he employs a series of euphemisms for a non-conceptual, non-practical investment in beauty:

Thus, while the impossibility of formulating a certain kind of concept-connected interest on the basis of aesthetic judgments might be a consequence of Kant's explanation of aesthetic response, it does not follow that aesthetic response itself cannot produce a perfectly natural desire for the existence of its particular objects, nor that it cannot itself become the object of an equally natural—though certainly less determinate—desire.¹²

The phrases "perfectly natural desire" or "equally natural—though certainly less determinate—desire" outline the territory of aesthetic desire, but they do not give us a clear picture of desire as it stands outside of the practical faculty, and outside of merely sensuous inclinations. If one accepts Guyer's account, it is still necessary to sketch out a broader picture of the relationship between aesthetic desire and disinterested pleasure. Thus Guyer's account in *Disinterestedness and Desire in Kant's Aesthetics* is only a partial answer to the question of the "interest" of *disinterest*. We are left to ask where such a notion of aesthetic desire

11. This phrase comes from the title of section three in KANT, JUDGMENT, *supra* note 4, at 205, at 47 ("A Liking for the Agreeable Is Connected with Interest [*Das Wohlgefallen am Angenehman ist mit Interesse Verbunden*]").

12. Guyer, *supra* note 6, at 459.

might stand within Kant's rich taxonomy of designations, which, in addition to interest (*Interesse*), includes: feeling (*Gefühl*), emotion (*Rührung*), affect (*Affekt*), inclination (*Neigung*), gratification (*Vergnügen*), enjoyment (*Genießen*), sensation (*Empfindung*), sensation proper (*Sinnesempfindung*), sense (*Sinn*), sensibility (*Sinlichkeit*), and so on and so forth.

II

Although it may at first appear that these terms can be easily classified in relation to disinterested pleasure, their usage in the third *Critique* in relation to such pleasure requires significant elaboration. To begin with, Kant clearly and explicitly denies that aesthetic pleasure is an intellectual (*intellektuell*) pleasure. This contrast between aesthetic and intellectual pleasures, however, merely restates that aesthetic desire is not an interest, since the term intellectual is not a general term about mindedness, but refers specifically to the cognitive processes in the restrictive sense of the term, i.e., what is conceptual. Therefore, a thing or process can be entirely mental without at the same time being intellectual.¹³ This distinction therefore does not help us to understand Kant's view on disinterested pleasure as a *feeling* that is at the same time intrinsically connected to reflective mental processes.

On the other hand, the term sensation as it appears in the third *Critique* allows for a more productive inroad into the relation between aesthetic desire and disinterested pleasure. As is well known, the German *Empfindung* (along with the English term "sensation") carries the ambiguity of the Greek *aisthēsthai* (Aesthetic), meaning both sensation of the world and internal feeling.¹⁴ Kant notes in the published Introduction that the term aesthetic refers to "[w]hat is merely subjective in the presentation of an object, i.e., what constitutes its reference to the subject, and not to the object"¹⁵ He then distinguishes between two kinds of

13. See KANT, *JUDGMENT*, *supra* note 4, at 218–19, at 63. The passage states:

If the given representation, which occasions the judgment of taste, were a concept, which united understanding and imagination in the judging of the object into a cognition of the object, then the consciousness of this relationship would be intellectual (as in the objective schematism of the power of judgment, which was dealt with in the critique). But in that case the judgment would not be made in relation to pleasure and displeasure, hence it would not be a judgment of taste.

Id. (translation revised).

14. See the editor's note 45, in the Pluhar edition of *id.* at 228 n.45, at 75.

15. *Id.* at 188, at 28.

sensations—two aspects of our power of receptivity—that are both aesthetic and subjective even though they play a fundamental role in the production of cognitive-objective knowledge construction. First, sensation has a formal aspect: space as the *a priori* form of intuition through which external objects are given to us. Kant calls space the merely subjective feature of sensible representations in our cognition of appearances because it is subjective in the sense that our *a priori* capacities are not grounded in anything external. Second, sensation refers to our being affected by the content of sense-data—that is, by the “material” or “real” “through which something existing is given” in our “cognition of objects outside us.”¹⁶ Sense-data are “merely subjective in our presentations of things outside us” insofar as that which is received by the senses is already a matter of appearances rather than things-in-themselves. Sense-data are something received and are in this sense subjective for Kant. Both of these aspects of sensation are tied to cognition. However, Kant then introduces a third subjective kind of sensation, which will be central to disinterested pleasure: “that subjective [feature] of a presentation *which cannot at all become an element of cognition* is the *pleasure* or *displeasure* connected with that presentation.”¹⁷ In section three of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, Kant will call this subjective use of sensation “*feeling*”: “[w]e call that which must always remain merely subjective, and absolutely cannot constitute a representation of an object by the otherwise customary name of ‘feeling.’”¹⁸ Feeling no longer directly refers to anything external, since it is merely the awareness of one’s own internal state. At the beginning of section thirty-nine, “On the Communicability of a Sensation,” Kant will add a further distinction—*Sinnesempfindung* (sensation proper)—which reinforces the difference between feeling and the first two versions of subjective sensation laid out above. The form and content of externally-directed sensation (space as the *a priori* form of intuition and sense-data as the content of external perception) are kinds of *Sinnesempfindung*. As Pluhar notes, *Sinnesempfindung* literally means “sensation of sense.” Since *Sinnesempfindung* is concerned with receiving information from the external world, it is a sensation of sense impressions. On the other hand, “feeling *is not* sensation proper, precisely because it does not have its own

16. *Id.* at 188–89, at 28–29 (translation revised). Kant will use this distinction between the formal and the material aspects of sensation again in the beginning of section thirty-nine, “On the Communicability of a Sensation.” *Id.* at 291, at 157.

17. *Id.* at 189, at 29 (insertion in original).

18. *Id.* at 206, at 48 (translation revised).

sense [*Sinne*]”;¹⁹ feeling is a direct awareness of a state that a subject is in and does not have external sense-data as content. Thus, the difference between *Gefühl* and *Sinnesempfindung* shows that there is an objective and subjective side to what Kant calls “merely” subjective sensation. *Sinnesempfindung* is the objective side of subjective sensation; it is concerned with objects in the world. *Gefühl* is the subjective side of subjective sensation; it is only concerned with states of the subject.

Kant’s account is further complicated by the fact that *Gefühl* (as the subjective side of subjective sensation) is also bifurcated—even though Kant does not fully develop this distinction in an organized manner. When Kant discusses the difference between the objective and subjective meanings of sensation in section three of the *Analytic of the Beautiful* he categorizes agreeable pleasure under *Gefühl*:

The green color of the meadows belongs to objective sensation, as perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness belongs to subjective sensation, through which no object is presented [*vorgestellt wird*], i.e., to feeling, through which the object is considered as an object of satisfaction (which is not a cognition of it).²⁰

Despite the fact that Kant calls the green color of the meadows “objective sensation,” it is the same as what he referred to earlier as merely subjective sensation, i.e., the content side of *Sinnesempfindung*. The greenness is the objective side of merely subjective sensation because it still refers to something external; it has a “sense.” On the other hand, the “agreeableness” (the agreeable pleasure) is described as a “feeling.” Kant calls it “subjective sensation,” and what he means by this term here is that

19. *Id.* at 291 n.19, at 157.

20. *Id.* at 206, at 48 (translation revised). The full paragraph reads:

If a determination of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is called sensation, then this expression means something entirely different than if I call the representation of a thing (through sense, as a receptivity belonging to the faculty of cognition) sensation. For in the latter case the representation is related to the object, but in the first case it is related solely to the subject, and does not serve for any cognition at all, not even that by which the subject cognizes itself. In the above explanation, however, we understand by the word “sensation” an objective representation of the senses; and, in order not always to run the risk of being misinterpreted, we will call that which must always remain merely subjective and absolutely cannot constitute a representation of an object by the otherwise customary name of “feeling.” The green color of the meadows belongs to objective sensation, as perception of an object of sense; but its agreeableness belongs to subjective sensation, through which no object is represented, i.e., to feeling, through which the object is considered as an object of satisfaction (which is not a cognition of it).

Id. at 206, at 47–48 (translation revised).

it does *not* have a “sense”; it is an immediate, non-representational awareness of an internal state of the subject. And since it is no longer an awareness of something external, it does not partake of cognition. But while the feeling of agreeable pleasure is similar to the account of *Gefühl* in the published Introduction discussed above, in that feeling is non-cognitive in both accounts (i.e., not part of objective knowledge construction), the earlier account explicitly ties feeling to presentations. In the Introduction, feeling (pleasure or displeasure) is the subjective feature of a presentation (*Vorstellung*), which cannot become a part of cognition, but which remains “connected” (*verbundene*) “with that presentation.”²¹ In this earlier account of feeling, pleasure and displeasure are the means by which we are able to recognize the harmony or disharmony of the imagination and the understanding. This harmony between the faculties is the way that we are able to recognize purposive form, which includes experiences of beauty²² and experiences in which we are able to order empirical laws of nature under higher-order empirical laws.²³ This pleasure, then, is the pleasure that arises through reflective judgment, or what we can call “reflective pleasure.” What thus distinguishes agreeable feeling from reflective feeling is that agreeable feeling is a passive result that is produced “mechanistically” by something external, whereas reflective feeling is a result of the activity of the mind—the free play of the imagination in relation to the understanding. So, even though agreeable feeling does not have a sense, in that it is merely the sensation of the subject’s state without any presentation, the production of that state still has its ground in something external. The greenness of the meadow is still the source of the feeling of agreeable pleasure (the “satisfaction” within the subject) even if that greenness does not provide feeling with content. This is why agreeable pleasure can arise even without the employment of judgment.²⁴ In contrast, reflective feeling can *only* arise through judgment. It is concerned merely with the form of an object and whether that form allows us to discern purposiveness, and it is not based on sense-data as content: “[f]or the basis of the [reflective] pleasure is posited merely in the form of the object for reflection in general, and

21. *Id.* at 189, 28–29. As quoted above: “that subjective [feature] of a presentation *which cannot at all become an element of cognition* is the *pleasure or displeasure* connected with that presentation.” *Id.* at 189, at 29 (insertion in original).

22. *See id.* at 190–91, at 30–31.

23. *See id.* at 187–88, at 27–28.

24. *Id.* at 207, at 48 (“Indeed, what is agreeable in the liveliest ways requires no judgment at all about the character of the object”)

hence not in a sensation of the object”²⁵ Thus, the most significant form of sensation in the third *Critique*, namely the recognition of “aesthetic presentation[s] of purposiveness,”²⁶ is only sensation in the most strained manner: sensation without sense.²⁷

It should be clear then that *Gefühl* (as the subjective side of subjective sensation) thus has two completely distinct meanings. While in many ways the differences between these notions of feeling are clearly acknowledged by Kant—for instance, he is adamant that reflective feeling must be free and non-mechanistic—in other ways, some confusion is carried over into the elaboration of disinterested pleasure. I will now turn to the often-discussed problem of the sequence of disinterested pleasure and reflective judgment in order to highlight how there is an unintended remainder of the agreeable within disinterested pleasure and the consequences of this.

III

In section nine of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, Kant outlines the notion of feeling as subjective sensation that is necessary for disinterested pleasure. Here he identifies feeling as the way that the subjective unity of the imagination and the understanding makes itself known to us in an experience of the beautiful: since such unity is non-conceptual, we can only have access to it through *Gefühl*. Disinterested pleasure registers the harmony between these faculties, in lieu of conceptual understanding. Kant says that the “unity in the relation [between the cognitive powers] in the subject can only reveal itself through sensation,”²⁸ by which he means aesthetic feeling.

The passages linking feeling with the harmony of the faculties contain a certain amount of ambiguity and thus raise a number of critical questions.²⁹ On the one hand, Kant gives us a picture in which a representation in the mind “acts as a stimulus” for reflective judgment. The word that is translated here as “stimulus” is *Anlasse*—which also has the sense of an event or occasion. In this case, the term Kant employs

25. *Id.* at 190, at 30.

26. *Id.* at 189, at 29.

27. As Kant puts it: “*Wenn eine Bestimmung des Gefühls der Lust oder Unlust Empfindung genannt wird,*” which translates to, “[w]hen a determination of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is called a sensation, this term means something quite different than sensation as ‘the presentation [*Vorstellung*] of a thing (through the senses, a receptivity which belongs to the cognitive power).” *Id.* at 206, at 47 (translation revised).

28. *Id.* at 219, at 63 (insertion in original).

29. *See id.*

suggests that a presentation (*Vorstellung*) is an opportunity for reflective activity, and not simply a cause of that activity. Should the presentation be the right kind for beauty, the imagination and understanding come to stand in a relation of harmony. We can have access to this result, (the state of harmony), only through the feeling of pleasure. According to this reading, disinterested pleasure is merely the result of another process—the harmony arrived at in the free play of the faculties. The feeling of disinterested pleasure would therefore function as a kind of signal. This would indeed suggest that the significance of aesthetic pleasure is distinct from the significance of sensuous and moral pleasure, since disinterested pleasure would not be the result of an unfree, mechanistic process. But since feeling played no part in the activity of reflection, feeling itself would be something intrinsically passive.

On the other hand, the passage lends itself to another reading in which the harmony of the faculties would bear a deeper relation to the feeling of pleasure than that of cause and effect. In this case, feeling would be more directly connected to the process of mental activity as reflection. When Kant explains that the only possible consciousness of the harmony between the faculties is feeling, he says that “no other consciousness of [the relation of harmony] is possible except through sensation of the effect [*durch Empfindung der Wirkung*] . . .”³⁰ Kant then says that this “sensation of the effect” directly “consists in the facilitated play of both powers of the mind (imagination and understanding), enlivened through mutual agreement.”³¹ If we read the phrase “sensation of the effect,” such that the effect is the harmony of the faculties when confronted with an occasion for beauty, and the sensation is our feeling or consciousness of that effect, then we end up with an account in which feeling is merely a signal—as above. In this case, the *effect* (i.e., the harmony) would directly consist in the play of the faculties and the mutual enlivenment. However, it can also be read in another manner such that it is the *sensation* (of the effect) that directly consists in that play and mutual agreement. According to this reading, the sensation (i.e., the aesthetic feeling) would not merely be an awareness of the harmonic agreement of the faculties; it would constitute that agreement. To put it more directly, the feeling would not be a signal of some underlying state (a state of harmonic relation between the faculties). The feeling of pleasure would directly be a certain kind of internal relation: harmony. Aesthetic pleasure would be constituted by the

30. *Id.* (translation revised).

31. *Id.* (translation revised).

internal relation of harmony rather than being a mere representative of that state of harmony.

Of course, this reading is in tension with certain passages in which Kant does seem to imply that feeling is merely an awareness of harmony. However, it is my intention to show that this issue is an unresolved tension, even in those passages in which Kant seems to be maintaining a separation between feeling and harmonic relation. For example, in the passage that has been under discussion, the contrast between objective relation and the subjective conditions of that objective relation at first appears to position feeling as the mere consciousness of an underlying relation:

An objective relation can only be thought. Still, insofar as it has subjective conditions, it can nevertheless be sensed in the effect it has on the mind; and if the relation is not based on a concept . . . then the only way we can become conscious of it is through sensation of [the] effect [*durch Empfindung der Wirkung*] . . .³²

A comparison is being made here between the way that we can become aware of an objective relation and the way that we can become aware of the subjective conditions of an objective relation. In the former case, we become aware through thinking, by which Kant means conceptual cognition. In the later, we become aware through feeling. However, as we know, Kant's conception of the objective cognition of appearances is mind-dependant. The essence of the Copernican turn is that the mind determines nature *qua* appearances, which is to say, there is not merely some objective relation to be recognized prior to the activity of the mind. In this sense, to think an objective relation is not merely to recognize that relation; the concept that has its source in the mind is the very relation (the synthesis) itself, along with the awareness of something as synthesized. To think an objective relation is not just to be aware of something pre-existing; it is to constitute that relation through synthetic activity. Read in this way, it would make sense to claim that (1) a non-conceptual relation is also constituted by the activity of the mind (which Kant clearly agrees with this in his conception of reflective judgment), and (2) that the feeling is not merely the awareness of a unity; it is that unity itself. Aesthetic feeling, as the subjective conditions of an objective relation, is not just consciousness of a relation under conditions where concepts are not (yet)

32. *Id.* at 219, at 63. Pluhar translates the end of this last part of the quote above as "sensation of this relation's effect," but this is already an interpretation of the passage, in an attempt to clarify the meaning. In fact, Kant only says "sensation of the effect." *Id.*

applied; reflective feeling is both the relation itself and the consciousness of it.

The overall point of reading this passage in this perhaps counter-intuitive manner is that it implies that Kant is using the harmony of the faculties and the feeling of pleasure interchangeably. From this, it would follow that the feeling of pleasure is not merely a subsequent signal, after harmony occurs, but that harmony and feeling are somehow intrinsically related and simultaneous. What is at stake in this interpretation is not just whether the cause of aesthetic pleasure (reflective play) is free or unfree—it is clear from Kant's conception of aesthetic reflective judgment that it is free—but whether there is something intrinsic to aesthetic pleasure itself that participates in the free play of judgment.

The problem with the first reading above in which harmony and pleasure are separable, and pleasure functions as a mere signal, is that pleasure is positioned as a result. But, as long as pleasure is conceived as a consequence of another process, it can always function as an intentional aim. In this case, it is difficult to see how aesthetic feeling could bear the structure of aesthetic desire without falling back into the logic of sensuous interest. Pleasure as a signal is too similar to gratification in the agreeable, since once it stands outside the activity of reflection itself, it can function as the *aim* of reflection. And this would constrain the purity or unobstructed freedom of aesthetic reflection, and risk the collapse of aesthetic desire into sensuous interest. This would be the unintended remainder of the agreeable within disinterested pleasure that I gestured at earlier. As long as aesthetic pleasure is treated as something subsequent to harmony, there is nothing radical about Kant's theory of aesthetic *feeling*. The significance of aesthetic feeling would be limited to the manner in which it is produced, in distinction from moral and sensuous interests.

However, if pleasure and harmony are treated as being interchangeable, as in the second interpretation of the passage, then Kant can be understood to be introducing a new kind of feeling that is not the kind of "brute sensations" that arises in agreeable pleasure. This introduction would be in line with Rachel Zuckert's claim that aesthetic feelings cannot be "primitive mental state[s]" because they possess a complex intentional structure.³³ They are complex in that they are certain kinds of constitutive forms or relations, such as unity, disunity, and diversity—even if they are non-discursive and non-conceptual.

33. Rachel Zuckert, *A New Look at Kant's Theory of Pleasure*, 60 *J. AESTHETICS & ART CRITICISM* 239, 240 (2002).

This view can be further supported through the connection between the feeling of pleasure and purposiveness that Kant draws in the published Introduction. Whereas Kant uses the feeling of disinterested pleasure and the harmony of the faculties almost interchangeability in the passages discussed above (in my interpretation), here he identifies feeling with purposiveness. In this passage, purposiveness and feeling are defined in identical terms as “the subjective aspect in a representation which cannot become an element of cognition at all”³⁴ He also says that, “[t]he object is . . . called purposive . . . only because its representation is immediately connected with the feeling of pleasure.”³⁵ While Kant is not yet talking about aesthetic feeling, but transcendental feeling in general, this “immediate connection” between purposiveness and feeling suggests that the feeling of pleasure is not subsequent to the recognition of purposiveness, or a mere signal of it. And if pleasure operates in this way for all reflective judgments, then it should also hold in the case of aesthetic reflective judgments. Moreover, transcendental feeling is meant to bridge the gap between practical and theoretical legislation—something that cannot be achieved by cognition in the strict sense. In this capacity, feeling certainly seems to be claim-bearing and complex such that aesthetic pleasure is not an effect of judging, but somehow intrinsically relates to reflecting and judging.

It seems necessary to maintain this view of the complexity of disinterested pleasure if it is to play the role that Kant assigns to it. This is because aesthetic feeling is something that is actually *felt*—and not merely a euphemism for intellectual delight, as Kant makes clear—while at the

34. IMMANUEL KANT, *CRITIQUE OF THE POWER OF JUDGMENT* 189, at 75 (Paul Guyer ed., Paul Guyer & Eric Matthews trans., 2001) (emphasis omitted). Kant states:

However, the subjective aspect in a representation which cannot become an element of cognition at all is the pleasure or displeasure connected with it [T]he purposiveness that precedes the cognition of an object, which is immediately connected with it even without wanting to use the representation of it for a cognition, is the subjective aspect of it that cannot become an element of cognition at all. The object is therefore called purposive in this case only because its representation is immediately connected with the feeling of pleasure; and this representation itself is an aesthetic representation of the purposiveness.

Id. (emphasis omitted). It is clear that a number of the claims made here conflict with claims that Kant will later make, notably, the order of the judgment and the pleasure. There is also the question of whether or not there is a special or even founding relationship between the principle of purposiveness and *aesthetic* reflective judgment, as opposed to reflective judgment in general. Rachel Zuckert, for instance, will claim that there is such a special relationship between purposiveness and aesthetic judgment. See Zuckert, *supra* note 33, at 245. My point, in using this quote, is not to take an ultimate position on those issues, but merely to show the deep relationship between feeling and the recognition of purposiveness.

35. KANT, *JUDGMENT*, *supra* note 4, at 190, at 30 (translation revised).

same time it is tied to subjective universality. If it is only the source (either free play or constraint by rules) that allows us to differentiate between the sensations of agreeable gratification and disinterested pleasure, then it is difficult to see how aesthetic feeling relates to the reflective play of the imagination without defiling the purity of the aesthetic judgment. If Kant's account of disinterested pleasure is to explain our unique kind of investment in beauty (what I have been calling aesthetic desire), the pleasure itself, and not only its source (i.e., the process of reflection) must be distinct from agreeable and moral pleasure. Or, to put it more precisely, pleasure and process are no longer so clearly distinguishable. In distinction from passive forms of pleasure—aesthetic feeling must bear a more direct connection to intuition and reflection.

In my view, Kant is grappling with the thought that there is a kind of pleasure that is not merely a conditioned bodily response, nor a mere mental abstraction, but one that intrinsically relates embodied feeling and the process of mental reflection. The reason, in my view, that Kant is conflicted about giving full weight to the idea that feeling and relation are unified, is that the term “feeling” has had an historic connection to merely individual sensations, emotions for example. Emotions, however, are usually taken to be utterly individual and in this respect cannot provide a ground for the subjective universality of taste. However, Kant's theory of reflective feeling is clearly radically distinct from this. Kant's hesitation is a consequence of not fully committing to the radicality of the notion of feeling that he has already proposed. Reflective feeling, as a connection between bodily states and mental processes, introduces a new intermediate territory that Kant's prior conceptual categories struggle to contend with. One passage that is particularly expressive of this struggle can be found in section five of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*.³⁶ There Kant says:

Agreeableness holds for nonrational animals [*vernunftlose Thiere*] too; beauty only for human beings, i.e., beings who are animal and yet rational, though it is not enough that they be rational (e.g., spirits) but they must be animal as well; the good, however, holds for every rational being as such³⁷

36. *Id.* at 216–17, at 61.

37. *Id.* at 210, at 52. The German reads as follows:

Annehmlichkeit gilt auch für vernunftlose Thiere; Schönheit nur für Menschen, d.i. thierische, aber doch vernünftige Wesen, aber auch nicht blos als solche (z.B. Geister), sondern zugleich als thierische; das Gute aber für jedes vernünftige Wesen überhaupt; ein Satz, der nur in der Folge seine vollständige Rechtfertigung und Erklärung bekommen kann.

The three kinds of pleasures (the agreeable, the beautiful, and the good) and the three kinds of beings (animals, humans, and purely rational beings) can be aligned with the three kinds of interests: sensuous interests, disinterest, and practical interests. A purely rational creature would not be able to experience beauty, since it would be fully invested in practical interests, leaving no room for aesthetic desire. The non-rational animal also cannot experience beauty since pleasure in “the agreeable [is] a liking that is conditioned pathologically by stimuli (*stimuli*)”³⁸ But if neither of these kinds of beings can experience beauty, it is curious that Kant claims that human beings must be a combination of these features in order to be the kind of being capable of experiencing beauty. Or put otherwise, it is difficult to see how the mere aggregation of two sources of interests—rational pleasure and sensuous pleasure—could account for the appearance of disinterested pleasure.

Why then does Kant claim that we *must be* part animal in order to experience beauty, if animal pleasure is pathologically conditioned? When Kant makes this claim I take him to mean that certain aspects of human experience that are ordinarily associated with embodied heteronomy—feeling, sensation, and sensuous desires—need not be fully conditioned, as they are for animals. Human animality is thus distinct from animal animality. Our capacity for rational reflection not only allows us to act freely, rather than be controlled by natural desires; it allows us to transform those desires. That is to say, our capacity for thinking denaturalizes our feelings, sensations, and inclinations so that they are intrinsically plastic, and open onto our freedom (we might call this distinct kind of animality the “huminal”). It is because our desire is denaturalized, by our having reason, that even our feelings and sensations are intrinsically complex and no longer reducible to primitive bodily states. And it is because of this that aesthetic desire and aesthetic feeling can be non-conditioned modes of sensation that occupy an intermediary territory between animal inclinations and purely rational interests. It is because human animality is distinct from animal animality that Kant can use transcendental feeling interchangeably with purposiveness and aesthetic feeling interchangeably with the harmony of the faculties.

38. *Id.* at 209, at 51.

IV

In order to clarify this view of the intricate connection between thinking and embodied feeling, I will now turn to a long footnote in the published Introduction where Kant speaks about affects in the context of wishing and desiring. First he says:

I have been reproached . . . for defining the power of desire as the *power of being the cause, through one's presentations, of the actuality of the objects of these presentations*. This criticism was that, after all, mere wishes are desires too [*bloße Wünsche doch auch Begehungen wären*], and yet we all know that they alone do not enable us to produce their object. That, however, proves nothing more than that some of man's desires involve him in self-contradiction [*mit sich selbst im Widerspruche steht*], inasmuch as he uses the presentation by itself to strive to produce the object, while he cannot expect success from it. Such is the case because he is aware that his mechanical forces . . . which would have to be determined by that presentation in order to bring the object about . . . are either insufficient, or perhaps even directed to something impossible [*etwas Unmögliches*], such as to undo what is done . . . , or as being able, as one is waiting impatiently for some wished-for moment, to destroy what time remains.³⁹

Kant is making the point that wishing—as opposed to practical desires or interests—is a state of self-contradiction, because it tries to produce a result in the world merely through a presentation in one's mind. Since wishing does not actualize an object or aim in the world, it wills the end without willing the means. On the other hand, practical desire for Kant is *non-contradictory* because it is analytically true that having a practical desire (i.e., an interest) entails our activity of actualizing that desire. For something to be a practical interest it must be conceptualizable, and capable of being something real, which is to say, it must obey the laws of non-contradiction. If we take wishing as a model for aesthetic desire, then practical interest is excluded from aesthetic pleasure because we can only take an interest in the existence of an object if that “object” is conceptually coherent. To be an object of aesthetic desire, on the other hand, is to be an object of wish—an impossible object, an object with contradictory

39. *Id.* at 177–78 n.18, at 16–17. An earlier version of this footnote can be found in the First Introduction at 230–31 n.50, at 421–22.

predicates, for example. The object, which is the occasion of aesthetic pleasure, is very much like a wish that can only be realized within aesthetic form.⁴⁰ In this sense, beauty is the impossible made possible.

The idea of aesthetic desire as a mode of wishing can be further supported when Kant goes on to connect wishing with affects in the same footnote:

In such fanciful desires [*phantastischen Begehrungen*] [as destroying time] we are indeed aware that our presentations are insufficient (or even unfit) to be the *cause* of their objects. Still their causal relation, and hence the thought of their *causality*, is contained in every *wish* and is especially noticeable . . . when that wish is an affect [*Affect*], namely, *longing* [*Sehnsucht*].⁴¹

Longing as it appears here is an impossible wish because it wants what cannot be achieved by any action whatsoever. Implicit in this description of longing is that an affect is not a brute sensation. It can be composed of two fully discursive propositional thoughts that contradict one another, both of which are structured through relations of causality. The first thought is the fanciful desire to be able to control time merely through one's will. The second thought is that time is not subject to the will. Affect, in this case, is a kind of feeling that holds together in a unity two contradictory thoughts; or, we might say, affect is the synthesis of what cannot be unified within the understanding or at the conceptual level, because it disregards the law of non-contradiction. Affect is thus a non-cognitive synthesis where a feeling arises instead of a concept—and this feeling is the consciousness of a particular kind of relation. In this example, the feeling of longing is a sensation (a form of conscious awareness) that expresses a state of contradiction between two contradictory propositions. This entails that while the feeling is non-cognitive in the strict sense, its components can be discursive even if they are not consciously available, and the relation between elements can be discursively translated. Affects are capable of embodying relations of form. They are felt-forms. The logic of affect sheds light on one of the central features of aesthetic form—that feeling is directly tied to the capacity to grant non-conceptual unity to what is heterogeneous. Affects make emphatic that aesthetic feeling is not mere sensation (in the sense of an awareness that lacks intrinsic complexity).

40. This is part of the reason why works of art occupy a singular space that ordinary objects cannot, even beyond the frame of beauty.

41. KANT, JUDGMENT, *supra* note 4, at 178 n.18, at 17.

Kant's example describes an intermediary space where feeling and meaning already coincide, and in this respect, affect offers an in-road into the domain of human "animality," or more precisely, feeling that is not pathologically conditioned. Affect designates that our feelings are complex and contend with structures of logical ambivalence. This is not only relevant to the content of particular aesthetic judgments. This kind of logical ambivalence also applies to Kant's descriptions of aesthetic form itself: disinterested *pleasure* as interest without interest; purposiveness without purpose as lawfulness without law; and, subjective universality as unity without conceptual unity. This is in addition to the fact that—as Rudolf Makkreel has pointed out in his *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*—Kant brings together two apparently conflicting affective stances in our experience of the beautiful: restful contemplation and vital enlivenment.⁴² Kant's general dismissal of affects throughout the third *Critique*, as being too interested and psychological for playing any role in aesthetic judging, should be read in light of the need for a more robust account of aesthetic feeling than Kant provides; transcendental feeling requires a transcendental account of affect.

In claiming that affect helps us to get at human animality, as an account of feeling that is not pathologically conditioned, I have been suggesting that between the non-rational animal and the purely rational being (that is only practical), stands another kind of logic—what we might call the irrational, or the more than rational. In this formulation, rationality would be constructed out of the irrational, through the barring of certain kinds of connections that the mind is capable of, but which are logically contradictory. To be clear, I am not suggesting that human beings lack reason, or that they are non-sensical, but that affect takes up elements of the rational and arranges them in configurations that would be strictly impossible from the perspective of the conceptual. And this is also true of the imagination in its free play in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment—so that a connection is drawn between the process of reflection and the structure that is operative within affect. This notion of the irrational as an expression of non-conceptual arrangement also allows us, in connection with wishing and affect as a model of aesthetic desire, to further distinguish aesthetic pleasure from pathological and practical pleasures. In section six of the published Introduction, Kant describes pleasure in terms of the satisfaction of an aim, and this description is meant to apply to

42. RUDOLF A. MAKKREEL, *IMAGINATION AND INTERPRETATION IN KANT: THE HERMENEUTICAL IMPORT OF THE CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT* 95–96 (1990).

sensuous pleasure, practical pleasure, and transcendental pleasure, insofar as it relates to the purposiveness of nature in our systemization of the empirical laws of nature. For aesthetic purposiveness-without-purpose, this account of aim satisfaction is at odds with the contingency of the judgment of taste, whose end-point cannot be imposed prior to the judgment itself. It was for this reason that I have also argued that pleasure should not be seen as a signal of a prior process of judgment. In this case, the logic of aim and its satisfaction seems to miss what is essential about disinterested aesthetic pleasure. The notion of affect as both a relation between elements and the consciousness of that relation through feeling helps to clarify how and in what way disinterested pleasure is too complex to fall within a linear model of the satisfaction of an aim. Following the account of logical ambivalence provided through affect, aesthetic pleasure can instead be seen as, at once, satisfaction and non-satisfaction. Aesthetic pleasure does not follow a structure of desire and lack, but overcomes this difference by unifying them into a single complex affective state of feeling: a pleasure in desiring itself. Our aesthetic desire motivates us to seek out aesthetic unities (purposive form without purpose); the activity of our mind constitutes and sustains the unity of that form; and this in turn sustains our aesthetic desire. We linger in the beautiful because of this reciprocally sustaining organization of desire, pleasure, and form. This kind of non-linear order bears some similarity to the logic of an organism, though deprived of the notion of purpose or function. What we experience in beauty is not the possession of an aim or an object, but a state of tension. Our lingering in the beautiful is that state of *suspension* between the activity of desiring the aesthetic form, and the activity of sustaining the unity of that form through the imagination. This is why the aesthetic pleasure is not a kind of aim-satisfaction, and why aesthetic pleasure reinforces and reproduces itself. By not achieving the aim (that is by not closing the circuit of desire and its “object”), the relation between elements is sustained, and the feeling of pleasure continues. The “satisfaction” of aesthetic pleasure is in this tension itself.

In understanding aesthetic pleasure as an affect, and an affect as a kind of relation, a connection is drawn between aesthetic pleasure and the structure of aesthetic unity as purposiveness-without-purpose. Purposiveness-without-purpose as the kind of order operative in the beautiful separates out from our notion of life what is pathologically conditioned and what is purely spontaneous. “Without purpose” excludes those aspects of animal life, such as mere self-preservation, that are functions over and above self-animation. Purposiveness-without-purpose thus refines life down to the impulse of spontaneity, which stands outside

the logic of mechanism or rational purpose. The self-reproducing character of aesthetic pleasure as lingering—as a state of pleasurable tension in the mutual dependance of desire and form—is the *reproduction* of the structure of life's animation, at the level of imagination and pleasure. The feeling of enlivenment that accompanies aesthetic pleasure, in Kant's account, is therefore attributable to this achievement of actively recreating, in another form, the self-animation that life *is*, aside from the functions of an organic body. As living creatures, spontaneity is not a product of our free activity; it is a condition of any freedom. In the experience of aesthetic pleasure, at the level of a wish, we reproduce self-animation through the structure of aesthetic desire and its pleasure. It is as if we make our aliveness a product of our own free activity, thus enfolding our aliveness as an unfree condition, back into our freedom. In the free play of aesthetic reflection, we incorporate into our activity the only remainder that conditions that free play—the source of our spontaneity. For a moment, it is as if our aliveness were nothing more than the spontaneity of the imagination—as if through a wish, we could finally become the pure cause of our own activity. Freedom and life stand together in aesthetic form, in wishful contradiction. In our appreciation of aesthetic form, as purposiveness-without-purpose, we experience this excessive dimension of human life, which is no longer animal. The exuberance of form that characterizes our experience of the beautiful is the way that the excess of human life—that is, human animality—is aesthetically inscribed.