

In Defense of Kant's Deduction of Pure Aesthetic Judgments

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In Kant and the Claims of Taste, Paul Guyer contends that Kant's deduction of judgments of taste given in §38 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* fails to establish the universal validity of such judgments. In this essay, I will defend Kant's theory of taste against Guyer's criticism by giving an alternative reading of the deduction. On the alternative reading, the judgment of taste is interpreted as that which sets up the tone of normativity during the cognitive process; as such, the judgment of taste (particularly, of beauty) can be construed as the smallest unit of or initial stage in making any type of judgment. In the first two sections, I will concisely present Guyer's criticism, offer the alternative reading, and explain how this reading can defend Kant's theory of taste. In the last section, I will briefly comment on the implication of my view, particularly in regard to the problem of rule-following that Saul Kripke raised; I will suggest that the notion of pleasure developed through the alternative reading may either refine or replace that of inclination, a kind of psychological state Kripke identifies as the bedrock of normativity.

In *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Paul Guyer contends that Kant's deduction of (or justification for) judgments of taste given in §38 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*¹ fails to establish the universal validity of such judgments.² In this essay, I will defend Kant's theory of taste against Guyer's criticism by giving an alternative reading of the deduction, which interprets the judgment of taste as that which sets up the tone of normativity during the cognitive process; as such, the judgment of taste (particularly, of beauty) can be construed as the smallest unit of or initial stage in making any type of judgment. In the first section, I will concisely present Guyer's criticism. In the second section, I will offer the alternative reading and explain how it can defend Kant's theory of taste. In the third section, I will briefly comment on the implication of my view, particularly in regard to the problem of rule-following that Saul Kripke raised; I will suggest that the notion of pleasure developed through the alternative reading may either refine or replace that of inclination, a kind of psychological state Kripke identifies as the bedrock of normativity.

I

In Kant's theory of taste, the judgment of taste (particularly, of beauty) is that in which a certain way of judging (or consciously experiencing) the object, viz., as beautiful, is *expected* to be universally valid, i.e., to be accepted as the right way of judging (or responding to) the object. Since this judgment is made without any reference to determinate concepts, however, its sense of normativity is not objective

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5: 289-90.

² Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 274-88.

as there is no definite rule by which the necessity of the assent to its verdict is to be justified.³ The question is then how the judgment of taste, in the absence of any determinate concepts, can maintain its normative force, or universal validity. Based on Henry E. Allison's interpretation⁴, Kant's deduction of (the universal validity of) judgments of taste could be reconstructed in the following three steps:

- (a) Since the pleasure we feel in a judgment of taste (e.g., that this flower is *beautiful*) is connected with the mere judging of its form, it is the subjective purposiveness for that judgment which we sense as connected with the representation of the object (i.e., the flower in reaction to which we have the feeling of pleasure).
- (b) Since the formal rules of judging (that this flower is beautiful or, more precisely, that the term 'beautiful' is to be predicated of the subject), in the absence of any sensation or concept, can only be drawn out of the subjective conditions involved in producing the judgment, to the extent that these conditions can be presupposed in other people (as the necessary conditions for the possibility of cognition in general), the judgment that is produced through these rules ought to be accepted by everyone.
- (c) The pleasure we have in a particular judgment of taste, the subjective purposiveness of that judgment (i.e., the formal rules of judging in the absence of any sensation or concept), is expected to be universally valid, or normative.

In Kant's terminology, the purposiveness of the form of an object (or the way in which the object is to be perceived) is the formulation (or, in Kant's own word, "constitution") of the object that is possible only in accordance with a concept as its end. For instance, the form in which an object is to be perceived as a hammer is possible only in reference to the concept, or for the *purpose*, of hitting a nail as its end. As such, purposiveness provides the principles (or rules) for judging an object.⁵ In the absence of (determinate) concepts, the subjective conditions involved in producing the judgment themselves (i.e., the psychological state a person is in during the cognitive process) supply purposiveness whereas, in §35, Kant identifies this state as the harmony (or proportional balance) between imagination and understanding.⁶ In turn, pleasure is what one feels of the given representation of an object in relation to this psychological state.⁷ In other words, pleasure is the impression one has of an object when its representation is in agreement (or compatible) with the harmony, in respect to which the person judges the object to be beautiful.

Guyer's criticism is that, even if we can attribute to someone the subjective conditions, i.e., the psychological state in which (or, the inner capacity through which) the harmony between imagination and understanding takes place, we cannot infer from this assumption that pleasure (or, as Guyer puts it, "aesthetic response") or, more precisely, the capacity to *feel* (or detect) the harmony can also be attributed to the person.⁸ The inner capacity for working out the harmony is itself "the general

³ 5: 203-44.

⁴ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 175-76.

⁵ 5: 180-81.

⁶ 5: 238-39, 286-88.

⁷ 5: 203-4.

⁸ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 284-88.

ability to unify a manifold under some empirical concept.”⁹ It is not logically warranted to infer from this ability, Guyer argues, the additional ability to feel (rather than think of) the harmony; the separation of the process of the inner capacity and the ability to detect the product of this process (i.e., harmony) is meant to differentiate beautiful objects from objects of knowledge.¹⁰ Allison expresses a similar concern when he remarks, “[T]he most persistent and widespread criticism of Kant’s deduction of taste is that ... it proves too much, namely, that every object must be judged beautiful[.]”¹¹ On behalf of Kant, Allison seeks to avoid the criticism by interpreting the harmony drawn in aesthetic responses as subjective conditions that involve “a suspension of our ... cognitive concerns with classification and explanation, as well as our sensuous and moral interests as rational agents.”¹² But Allison’s interpretation suggests that the subjective conditions (i.e., the inner workings of the interactions between imagination and understanding) involved in the judgment of taste and other types of judgment (such as moral and cognitive judgment) are different in kind. However, if so, it is questionable whether we can even attribute such subjective conditions to anyone at all since the reason why Kant thought that we could presuppose such conditions in everyone is because they are the necessary conditions for the possibility of cognition in general. It makes better sense to view the judgment of taste and other types of judgment as sharing the same (kind of) subjective conditions.

II

Given that, for exegetical coherency, we must interpret the subjective conditions as the common denominator of all types of judgment, any attempt to defend Kant’s theory of taste against Guyer’s criticism should explain how the ability to detect the harmony could be inferred from the ability to work out the harmony. I will argue that we can make this inference because the ability to detect, i.e., the *feeling*, is what imputes normativity to (or, so to say, creates the tone of normativity in) the inner workings of the subjective conditions. In Kant’s theory of cognition, concepts are construed as rules for synthesizing intuitions whereas judgments are the phases in the cognitive process during which the subject applies the concepts to the intuitions, which result in conscious experience.¹³ Within this formulation, concepts are supposed to be universally valid insofar as every rational agent has the faculty of cognition whose function is to apply or exhibit them. However, just because everyone happens to apply or exhibit the same concepts due to the contingent fact that he possesses some sort of faculty does by no means make those concepts any authoritative. Rather, what generates the sense of necessity in employing those concepts (through the interactions between imagination and understanding), i.e., the source of normativity, must be something attitudinal. It is in seeking to sustain

⁹ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 287.

¹⁰ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 287-88.

¹¹ Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste*, 184.

¹² Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Taste*, 187.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A20/B34, A100-1, A78-79/B104, A100-10, 121, B130-31, 141-43, 163, A98-102; Jay Rosenberg, *Assessing Kant: A Relaxed Introduction to the Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 94-97; David Landy, *Kant’s Inferentialism: The Case Against Hume* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 121-22, 132-36; Hannah Ginsborg, “Kant and the Problem of Experience,” *Philosophical Topics* 34, nos. 1/2 (2006): 66.

as a unified operation the very inner workings of harmony one treats concepts as rules, or authoritative references.

Whether concepts are given or not, imagination and understanding continue to interact with each other as to produce schemata. If concepts are given, these schemata are fit into the rest of the judgments one already has. If not, these schemata become (empirical) concepts themselves serving as the rules (or samples for understanding) any similar patterns encountered in the future.¹⁴ In the absence of any determinate concept, how do the inner workings of cognition operate as to discover the underlying principles in the manifolds of sensation through association rather than give up such an attempt? That is, in respect to what does the reflective power of judgment initiate the search for empirical concepts? Based on Béatrice Longuenesse's analysis of Kant's theory of cognition, Allison explains that, on Kant's view, it must be presupposed that there is something universal in itself about the manifolds of sensation in order to initiate the operation of the faculty of cognition to discover or exhibit underlying principles:

[For Kant,] the contents of these acts of apprehension contain something “universal in itself[,]” ... on the base of which the schemata themselves are formed, insofar as this content is to provide the foundation for a universalizing comparison ... Clearly, reflection, so construed, rests on the assumption that there is something “universal in itself” encoded ... in our experience ... [W]ithout this presupposition the process of reflection would never get off the ground.¹⁵

In other words, the ground on which the inner workings of the faculty of cognition (interactions between imagination and understanding) operate is the presupposition that there are underlying principles (to be discovered) in nature. It is in reference to this presupposition the inner workings impose the sense of necessity to the concepts that are involved in or produced by their operation. Whatever this presupposition consists in, it must precede not only all concepts, but also the very predilection to understand an object in reference to or by exhibiting some concepts. If so, this presupposition consists solely in some sort of aptitude to perceive things in terms of norms (or in a lawful manner). That is, it is a kind of attitude or stance one takes towards what he sees (viz., the manifolds of sensation) that there are right and wrong ways of taking them in.

This attitude or aptitude (the source of normativity) cannot be the ability to work out the harmony, or “unify a manifold under some empirical concept[,]” because, as explained above, it precedes that very predilection to exhibit some (empirical) concepts. In fact, it is by having this attitude towards the process of subsuming imagination under understanding that the conditions this process results in are taken as appropriate for cognition. Now, let us turn to what Kant means by ‘pleasure.’ Allison observes that Kant characterizes pleasure as the “feeling of [the promotion of] life” whereas (i) “life” refers to “the faculty of a being by which one acts according to the faculty of desire” and (ii) the latter faculty is that which “such a being has of causing, through its ideas, the reality of the object of these ideas.”¹⁶ Accordingly, pleasure (or aesthetic response) is the feeling one has when the part of his cognitive faculty that drafts purposiveness is in proper action. In turn, the function of purposiveness is, so to say, to maximize one's understanding of an object by, as explained above,

¹⁴ 20: 220, 5: 179-80, 351; Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, 14-30.

¹⁵ Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, 28.

¹⁶ 5: 204; Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, 69.

providing a principle for or way of perceiving the object. Whether the cognitive process is going smoothly is assessed by how harmonious the interactions between imagination and understanding are. Yet, the interactions, or inner workings, do not themselves decide on what the harmonious conditions are supposed to be. Rather, this job is left to what we have identified as the aptitude to perceive things in terms of norms (or in lawful manner), or the stance one takes towards what he sees that there are right and wrong ways of taking them in, viz., the presupposition that there is something universal in itself about the manifolds of sensation.

Part of what make up such an attitude or stance must be how one *feels* about the outcome of the inner process. That is, without the ability to detect harmony or, more precisely, to appraise the interactions between imagination and understanding and appreciate them as being in proper conditions (for maximizing cognition), the subjective conditions do not amount to cognition in which concepts are imbued with authority. By having pleasure, i.e., judging that, e.g., this flower is *beautiful* (or, devising the term ‘beautiful’ as a predicate), the person is expressing that *there is a right way of perceiving this flower whatever it may be*. It is in reference to this specific feeling about the flower that his entire cognitive faculty sustains itself as capable of giving principles or rules for taking in *that particular flower*. In other words, as part of what constitute the aptitude to perceive things in terms of norms (or in lawful manner), pleasure (or aesthetic response) or, more precisely, the judgment of taste is that which sets up the tone of normativity.

Based on this analysis, it can be inferred that the function of the judgment of taste (or the meaning of perceiving something *as beautiful*), according to Kant, is to take in and convert (the representation of) a particular object into that to which concepts can be applied. Metaphorically put, by aesthetically responding to a single flower, a person is bringing (the representation of) that flower into the space of reasons in which (the intuition of) the particular flower gets to stand in various relations to other objects through general categories such as “flower,” “green,” etc. Pleasure provides the platform for this activity by generating the sense of normativity (by which concepts become authoritative) as a part of what sustains the inner process towards harmony *qua* process. Perhaps this is why, in Section VI of Introduction, Kant writes,

It thus requires study to make us attentive to the purposiveness of nature for our understanding in our judging of it, where possible bringing heterogeneous laws of nature under higher though always still empirical ones, so that if we succeed in this accord of such laws for our faculty of cognition . . . , *pleasure* will be felt.¹⁷

As such, the judgment of taste (particularly, of beauty) can be construed as the smallest unit of or initial stage in making any type of judgment because, whereas the subjective conditions are the common denominator of all types of judgment, pleasure (in respect to which a person perceives an object as beautiful) gets the process of these subjective conditions “off the ground.”

If the ability to feel or detect the harmony, viz., pleasure (the subjective purposiveness of the judgment of taste), is requisite for exercising the ability to work out the harmony, although it may be an additional capacity, it must be presupposed in everyone to whom the inner capacity to work out the harmony (to “unify a manifold under some empirical concept”) is attributed. Thus, in contrast to what Guyer argues, a person is *not* capable of knowledge if he is not also capable of detecting or being

¹⁷ 5: 187-88; The emphasis is mine.

“conscious of unity in a manifold without subsuming it under a concept.”¹⁸ Therefore, in attributing the subjective conditions involved in making judgments, we can also attribute the capacity for making the judgment of taste because the ability to detect the harmony is indeed inferable from the ability to work out that harmony. If this is the case, which I hope to have demonstrated that it is so, Kant’s deduction of judgments of taste is successful.

III

In *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (1982), Kripke raises the problem of rule-following that there is in principle no fact of the matter as to what rule-following, or normativity, comes down to.¹⁹ Thus, Kripke identifies as the bedrock of normativity a type of psychological state he calls ‘inclination,’ a brute impulse to react to a cue in a certain way, which—according to Kripke—has no substantive content in itself apart from the endorsement by the community.²⁰ There are at least two ways my reading of Kant’s deduction above can respond to this problem. First, pleasure as a psychological state that has a substantive content (viz., setting up of the tone of normativity) may be applied to refine Kripke’s notion of inclination. Thus, in contrast to what Kripke argues, our impulse to react to a cue in a certain way is not at all brute, but is loaded with the aptitude to perceive things in terms of norms (or in lawful manner). Second, in case Kripke’s notion of inclination resists any substantiation, pleasure or the judgment of taste as interpreted in my reading can replace the inclination as the bedrock of normativity.

One of the problems with Kripke’s account of normativity is that it fails to expound on what this inclination consists in so that this psychological state (rather than, e.g., fear, happiness, etc.) can generate the sense of normativity and how the community decide on which inclinations to endorse. As a result, Kripke (rather unsatisfactorily) alludes to the mysterious Wittgensteinian notion of “*forms of life*” in discussing how normativity (as well as communicability) emerges through community agreements.²¹ There may indeed be a way to work out some coherent theory of normativity within this *Kripkensteinian* framework. However, I think that my interpretation of Kant’s theory of taste provides an alternative way of approaching the issue, and to the extent that this approach could avoid obscure notions such as “*forms of life*,” I would like to propose that it is worth exploring solutions to the problem of normativity from the Kantian angle.

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¹⁸ Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 285-86.

¹⁹ Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1982), 7-54.

²⁰ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules*, 87-98.

²¹ Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules*, 97-98.

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