Kant's 'Young Poet' and the Subjectivity of Aesthetic Judgment

Hannah Ginsborg, University of California, Berkeley

July 31 2016

Forthcoming in Violetta L. Waibel and Margit Ruffing (eds.), *Proceedings of the 12th International Kant Congress: Nature and Freedom* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter)

In a well-known passage at §32 of the *Critique of Judgment* Kant describes the case of a young poet who judges that his own poem is beautiful, even though both his friends and the public disagree with his assessment of it. In Kant's story, the young poet listens to his critics, and, it seems, even pretends to agree with them, but still does not change his mind. He does not allow himself to be dissuaded from his conviction [*Überredung*] that the poem is beautiful, believing instead that there is something wrong with everybody else's taste. Only later, Kant says, when his judgment has been "sharpened by exercise" (KU, AA 05:282.28) does he freely depart from his previous judgment.[1]

In the young poet example, the subject is maintaining his judgment that an object is beautiful in spite of others who do not find it to be beautiful. In the next section, Kant offers a counterpart example where someone who does not find a building, view or poem beautiful "inwardly does not allow approval to be imposed upon him by a hundred voices all praising it to the skies" (KU, AA 05:284.6-7). Here again the suggestion is that he is doing the right thing: "he sees clearly that the approval of others provides no valid proof for the judging of beauty" (KU, AA 05:284.13-15). Kant says that this subject, whom we can think of as the poet's

[1] All translations are my own, although I have been guided by currently available English translations of the *Critique of Judgment* and *First Introduction*, in particular those of Meredith, Pluhar, and Guyer and Matthews.

negative counterpart, might not only pretend to agree with his opponents, but also allow himself to some extent to be influenced by them. In fact, "he may even begin to doubt whether he has formed his taste enough through acquaintance with a sufficient number of objects of a certain kind" (KU, AA 05:284.9-11), the way someone who thinks he sees a distant wood where others see a town may doubt his own sight. However, as in the case of the young poet, he realizes that "the fact that others have liked something can never serve him as the ground of an aesthetic judgment" (KU, AA 05:284.18-19).

These examples constitute part of Kant's argument for a more general point about judgments of beauty which he makes in the first moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful, namely that – to use the terms in which he introduces the point in paragraph §1 – "their determining ground cannot be other than subjective" (KU, AA 05:203.14-15). It is a judgment which, as he puts it in the Deduction, is made "merely from the subject's *own* feeling of pleasure in the object, independent of its concept" (KU, AA 05:288.28-29) and where, instead of a concept's being applied to the object, it is a feeling of pleasure – and specifically one's own pleasure – which plays the role of a predicate (KU, AA 05:288.34-36). I will abbreviate this as the subjectivity of a judgment of beauty. A judgment of beauty does not consist in the recognition of an objective feature of the thing about which the judgment is made, but instead expresses or acknowledge some kind of relation between the thing, or the perceptual representation of the thing, and the subject's own feeling. Judgments of beauty resemble in this respect what Kant calls judgments of the agreeable, that is judgments which reflect or express nothing more than a person's liking for or pleasure in an object. Like the judgment expressed by someone who says or thinks "Canary wine is agreeable to me" or "I like Canary wine" (KU, AA 05:212.12-13), a judgment of taste makes ineliminable reference to the subject's own response to the thing judged. Even

though it has the form of a cognitive judgment "it affords absolutely no cognition of the object... it relates the representation by which an object is given solely to the subject, and does not bring to our notice any property of the object" (KU, AA 05:228.22-25). One consequence of the subjectivity of judgments of taste is that no-one can be rationally required to judge something beautiful on the basis of its satisfying antecedent criteria:

> there can be no rule in accordance with which someone could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful. Whether a dress, a house, a flower is beautiful: no one allows himself to be talked into his judgment about that by means of any grounds or fundamental principles" (KU, AA 05: 215.36-216.02).

The young poet and his negative counterpart illustrate what I take to be a second consequence of the subjectivity of a judgment of beauty: namely, that it cannot be made on the basis of another person's feeling of pleasure, but only on that of one's own. Judgments of beauty are like judgments of the agreeableness of food and drink in that I must perceive the object myself, and feel pleasure in it, just as, in the case of determining whether a certain food is pleasant to me, I must "try the dish on my own tongue and palate" (KU, AA 05:285.08-09). As in the case of the agreeable, I can rely neither on knowledge of other people's responses to an object, nor on my knowledge of general rules which people have laid down, in order to make a judgment that something is beautiful. We can call this second consequence the autonomy of taste.

Kant emphasizes these two consequences because, as he acknowledges, there is a strong temptation to think of judgments of beauty as objective. This is because, unlike judgments of the agreeable, they make a claim to universal agreement. Part of what is involved in making a judgment of beauty is that I take it that everyone who perceives the object ought to judge it the

same way that I do and thus, like me, to judge it to be beautiful. It is very hard to make sense of this claim to agreement without supposing that my judging consists in my recognition in the object of a feature or property which it has independently of my judging, and which I think that other perceivers of the object ought to recognize as well. As Kant puts it at §6, the judgment resembles what he calls a logical judgment – that is a cognitive judgment involving a concept – in as much as we may presuppose it to be valid for everyone, and it is just for this reason that, as he puts it, we "speak of beauty as if it were a property [Beschaffenheit] of the object" (KU, AA 05:211.23-24). Kant acknowledges this in a passage at the beginning of §32, shortly before he gives the example of the young poet, when he says that

> the judgment of taste determines its object with regard to liking (as beauty) with a claim to the assent of everyone, as if it were objective. To say "This flower is beautiful" amounts to...repeating its own claim to everyone's liking.... Now what should one suppose from this, other than that the beauty must be held to be a property [Eigenschaft] of the flower itself, which does not conform [sich richten] to the difference of heads and so many senses, but rather to which these heads and senses must conform, if they want to judge about it? (KU, AA 05:281.32-282.07).

What we seem to be judging, in other words, when we judge that an object is beautiful, is that it has some property in virtue of which it calls for, or has a claim to, a feeling of pleasure from those who perceive it. How, otherwise, could we claim that everyone who perceives that object should agree with our judgment? But Kant goes on to deny that the judgment ascribes to the object a property that is independent of our response to it. There is indeed, he suggests, a property or quality ascribed to the object in a judgment of beauty, but it is not one to which we think of our response as required to conform. Rather, and conversely, the property ascribed is

that of conforming to our response: it as though our pleasurable response to the object comes first, and our ascription of beauty to the object amounts to our taking the object to fit that response rather than taking it to have some feature with respect to which the response might or might not be correct. "The judgment of taste consists precisely in this: that it calls a thing beautiful only in accordance with that property [Beschaffenheit] in it by which it conforms [sich richten] to our way of apprehending [aufnehmen] it" (KU, AA 05:282.08-10).

Many interpreters of Kant have been reluctant to take at face value Kant's insistence on the subjectivity of taste, and they have done so partly because it has seemed like the only way to make intelligible the claim of a judgment of taste to universal agreement. Karl Ameriks offers what he calls a "mildly revisionist" account of taste, proposing that "for precisely Kant's purposes, it would be ultimately is better to say that judgments of taste are conceptual and objective".[2] Ameriks suggests that we might think of judgments of beauty on the model of judgments which ascribe secondary qualities, with the difference that beauty has a special elusiveness and, in particular, is such that it resists incorporation into empirical laws which would allow us to predict it. There is no reason, he thinks, why the pleasure shouldn't be a mode of awareness of such a property the way that a sensation of red can be awareness of a genuine property of redness. Other interpreters, while not explicit about regarding beauty as a genuinely objective property, have described the judgment of beauty in a way which at least seems to imply that it is objective. On Paul Guyer's interpretation, which has served as a model for many other readers,

> the judgment that a particular object *x* is beautiful amounts to the claim that everyone who perceives *x* should, apart from any predication of a concept of it, take pleasure in it, or that, under ideal conditions of non-interference from purely

[2] Ameriks, Karl: *Interpreting Kant's Critiques*. Oxford, 2003, 307.

> sensory pleasures and abstraction from any concepts that might effect an interested response – everyone who perceives *x* will take pleasure in it.[3]

To judge that a particular object is beautiful, then, is to make a prediction about how people who perceive the object under certain ideal circumstances will feel about it. But that seems to amount to the ascription to x of an objective property, albeit a relational one: it is to judge that x is such as to bring about certain feelings under certain circumstances. Guyer's view is different from that suggested by Ameriks's use of the secondary quality analogy, because, unlike Ameriks, he does not think that the pleasure itself is awareness of the relevant property, the way that a sensation of redness can be seen as the awareness of redness in the object. But both views construe beauty as something which can be seen, relatively unproblematically, as an objective feature of the things to which it is ascribed. And in both cases this allows us to make sense of how a judgment of beauty can claim universal agreement.

Both versions of objectivism are compatible with at least some of what Kant claims about the conditions under which we can and cannot judge something to be beautiful. That we cannot rely on principles for determining what counts as beautiful seems plausible enough even on an objectivist line. For while perhaps an intellect much more powerful than ours could might be able to discern laws connecting the beauty of an object with other and more easily discernible properties of it, we have no reason to think that the property of beauty stands in lawlike relations that are simple enough for a human being to grasp. More specifically, it seems plausible to suppose that our only evidence for judging something to be beautiful is the pleasure that is felt in it, along with whatever further evidence is needed to establish that the pleasure is being felt in the appropriate circumstances and involves no reference to the judger's interests. What the objectivist interpretation finds harder to accommodate is the autonomy of taste, which requires

[3] Guyer, Paul: *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (second edition). Cambridge 1997, 130.

that the pleasure on which the judgment of beauty is based must be that of the judger herself. This is especially clear in the case of the young poet's negative counterpart, who – it is suggested – cannot judge the poem to be beautiful even though everyone around him feels pleasure in it. Why can he not draw on his knowledge of other people's disinterested pleasure to inform him that the object has the property of beauty, just as a person who does not himself see some subtle pattern of coloration in an object might believe that it is there on the grounds that a hundred other people perceive it? Guyer specifies that the evidence required for a reasonable assertion that some *x* is beautiful, understood on the analysis sketched above, includes the judger himself feeling pleasure: "A person may reasonably assert that an object x is beautiful only if he takes pleasure in *x* and believes that his pleasure in x is due to the harmony to which the perception of *x* disposes his imagination and understanding".[4] But why couldn't the evidence equally well include someone else's pleasure as revealed by their own description of how the object strikes them? Guyer's answer turns on the need for the belief that the pleasure is due to the free harmonious play of the faculties, as opposed to some other source. That belief, it turns out, is highly fallible and requires extended reflection on one's own mental state.[5] However, it is not clear why the belief that a given feeling of pleasure is caused by the free play of the faculties has to rely for its warrant on introspection. It seems that I can know another person well enough to be able to form a rational view about whether the pleasure they express in an object is likely to derive from its satisfying one of their desires as opposed to having its source simply in the disinterested contemplation of the object.

[4] *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 130.
[5] *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 240f.

In earlier work, I have invoked the autonomy of taste as a means of arguing against the objectivist interpretation.[6] But I have also had broader programmatic reasons for trying to defend a subjectivist line. One of the motivations for the objectivist interpretation is that it seems that we need to construe a judgment as objective in order to make sense of its making a claim to universal agreement. But I have tried to pursue the possibility that we do not: that we can make sense of a judgment about an object which claims the agreement of others with respect to that object, without taking that claim to depend on the ascription to the object of an objective property. My broad interest in pursuing this possibility has to do not with anything about aesthetic judgment as such, but rather with considerations – loosely connected with Wittgenstein's remarks about rule-following – about our capacity to acquire concepts and what it is to possess them. That we are able to grasp a concept like *green* or *dog* depends on our having a capacity to think of our imaginative responses to particular green things or dogs as appropriate to, or called for by, those objects in a way which does not in turn depend on our having already subsumed the objects under corresponding concepts. To be in a position to represent something as falling under the concept *dog* a child needs both to be able to respond to it in a way distinctive of dogs – for example saying or thinking the word "dog!" or calling to mind memories associated with previously perceived dogs – and to do so in a way which involves the attitude that her response is appropriate as opposed merely to the feeling of being blindly compelled to respond that way. And this is something, I have argued, that she has to be able to do as a prior condition of representing something as a dog and hence something that cannot depend on her already recognizing it as a dog.[7] Now to suppose the possibility of this kind of nonconceptually based

[6] Ginsborg, Hannah. *The Normativity of Nature: Essays on Kant's* Critique of Judgement. Oxford 2015, Essay 1.

[7] For variations on this line of argument, see *The Normativity of Nature*, 82-84; 159-163, 182-186. For the connection with Wittgenstein, see *The Normativity of Nature*, 127-131.

but normative attitude is to suppose that it is possible to make claims about what response is called for by an object, and hence how perceivers of the object should or ought to respond to it, that are not based on the ascription of a concept to the object. So it is to reject the kind of view which I have described as motivating objectivism about judgments of beauty: the view that we cannot make sense of a judgment which makes a claim to universal agreement with respect to some object except by supposing that claim to be based on the recognition of an objective property of, or the ascription of a concept to, the object. On the contrary, I have suggested, we cannot account for the possibility of concept-possession and hence of objective cognition without supposing that our imaginative responses to objects involve a legitimate claim to their own universal validity which is not based on the recognition of those objects as falling under concepts.

In trying to make sense of some of the main ideas of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, I have gone on the hypothesis that this is how Kant sees things, and that he takes the investigation of the faculty of taste to be central to a discussion of our capacity to judge precisely because the fact of our making judgments of beauty reveals to us the normative claim to universal agreement which characterizes – in a way which is easier to see than in the cognitive case-- our imaginative responses to objects generally. My way of trying to make this suggestion out in detail has been to offer an interpretation of pure judgments of taste for Kant as imaginative responses to objects which are like the preconceptual imaginative responses I have described as making a nonconceptually based claim to their own universal validity except in that – in contrast to the imaginative responses which form the basis of concept-acquisition – we cannot specify the response other then by doing so indexically, as *just this* response. To make a judgment of beauty is to respond to the object imaginatively in a way which involves the non-conceptually

grounded or, as I'll say, "primitive" attitude that *this very* way of responding is appropriate to the object, where, in contrast to the cognitive case, it is not possible to replace the "this way" with some specific description of how one is responding – for example that one is seeing it as furry or four-legged, or that one is uttering the word "dog." On this view, the traditional distinctions separating, first, the judgment that an object is beautiful, second, the pleasure that one feels in a object which one judges to be beautiful, and, third, the free harmonious play of imagination and understanding which supposedly underlies the pleasure, collapse. The imaginative response I have just described counts as a judgment because it makes a claim to its own appropriateness to the object, and hence to its own universal validity. It counts as an instance of pleasure because of its nonconceptual character – which makes it a feeling rather than a cognition – and more specifically because it is self-reinforcing rather than self-undermining, which makes it a feeling of pleasure rather than displeasure. And it counts as the free play of imagination and understanding because what imagination does in response to the object is not governed by concepts – and hence is free – yet still involves consciousness of itself as according with a normative standard – which for Kant is the hallmark of the involvement of understanding.

This interpretation has struck many readers as implausible. I continue to think, however, that it does better than the alternatives in accounting for the otherwise notorious §9 of the *Critique of Judgment* – the so-called key to the critique of taste – in which Kant appears to claim that judging an object to be beautiful precedes the feeling of pleasure in the object, even though the judgment seemingly claims the universal validity of the subject's own feeling of pleasure. And it also seems to offer a way to hold on to Kant's subjectivism while still allowing that there is more to a judgment of beauty than a mere expression of liking for an object, as in a judgment of the agreeable. For someone who judges in the way I have described makes, not the generic

claim that all other perceivers of the object ought to feel disinterested pleasure in the object or ought to judge it to be beautiful, but the specific claim that everyone ought to have *this* feeling or to respond to the object imaginatively *this way*. This is a claim that can be made only by someone who has the feeling or imaginative response: that is, it can be made only by the person judging and by others who share her response to the object and thus judge it in just the same way she does. Now the person judging can indeed be said to recognize or to take herself to recognize something in the object, but it is not something intelligible antecedently of her judging, something in virtue of which the object calls for being judged the way she judges it, and to which her judging aims to conform. Rather, what she takes herself to see in the object is just the normative fit itself between the object and her own way of responding to it, or judging it: she takes it both that she is judging it appropriately and that, conversely, the object is suitable for being judged – that it ought to be judged or is meant to be judged – in just the way in which she is judging it. Going back to the passage at the beginning of §32, where Kant discusses our tendency to suppose that beauty of a flower is a property of the flower itself, what she ascribes to the object is "just that quality by which it conforms to [her] way of apprehending it" (KU, AA 05:282.09-10).

So far I have been drawing on the examples of the young poet and his negative counterpart to support my subjectivist view of Kant's account of beauty. But the examples also raise a serious problem both for my view and for subjectivist interpretations of Kant's aesthetics more generally. Like other examples of judgments of taste offered by Kant, they seem to show people disagreeing about whether something is beautiful. The young poet claims – or at least judges inwardly—that his poem is beautiful, but his friends and the public apparently disagree, and the poet himself, as he gets older and more experienced, comes to abandon his former

judgment, thus coming to disagree with his earlier self. And his negative counterpart seems likewise to be in disagreement with the hundred voices all claiming that a poem, building or view is beautiful. If beauty is an objective property, there is no difficulty making sense of this situation of disagreement. There is an objective, truth-apt proposition which the poet and his friends are disagreeing about. But on my view, as on subjectivist views more generally, there does not seem to be any content for the poet and his friends to be disagreeing about. Now as a along the lines of first stab at defending the subjectivist reading from this worry, it might be proposed, along the lines of C.L. Stevenson's defence of emotivism, that disagreement does not have to be about the truth of a proposition: that there can also be what Stevenson calls " disagreement in attitude".[8] Perhaps it is enough for disagreement that the poet likes his poem and his friend does not, which means they have attitudes which one person could not consistently hold together. (John MacFarlane calls this kind of disagreement "noncotenability".[9]) However, if that were all that were needed for disagreement, then there would also be disagreement in the case of judgments of the agreeable. And Kant makes clear that what he calls the "incompatibility" [Unvereinbarkeit] (KU, AA 05:337.08) of judgments of the agreeable is of a different kind from the disagreement involved in judgments of beauty. In the case of beauty, as he indicates in the Antinomy, we have *Streit*, typically rendered as conflict, quarrel or argument,[10] not just the variance in attitude or response which we get in the case of judgments about the agreeable. So at the very least we need something more to make sense of aesthetic disagreement than mere noncotenability.

[8] Stevenson, C.L. *Facts and Values*. New Haven, 1963, 1.
[9] MacFarlane, John. *Assessment Sensitivity*. Oxford, 2014, 121.
[10] More precisely, we do, or at least can, engage in *streiten* (KU, AA 05:338.15). Kant also refers to the disagreement as *Widerstreit* (KU, AA 05:337.10).

This difficulty is, on the face of it, connected with a further difficulty for my view and for other versions of subjectivism: that of how to make sense on Kant's account of negative judgments of beauty, whether judgments of the ugly, or simply judgments that something is not beautiful. On my view in particular a judgment of beauty, by which I mean a positive judgment of beauty, plays a special role in being the only state of mind which involves a primitive – that is, immediate and non-conceptually mediated – claim to its own universal validity with respect to an object. There is no counterpart feeling of displeasure or simply non-pleasure which involves a parallel claim to *its* own universal validity. But how, then, on my view, can we account for the fact that we do sometimes claim of an object either that it is not beautiful or that it is ugly? This difficulty has been pressed in particular by Henry Allison, who claims that a judgment of non-beauty, just like a judgment of beauty, is associated with a distinctive relation of imagination and understanding, but one which is disharmonious rather than harmonious. [11] This disharmonious play, for Allison, is no less universally communicable than a harmonious one, so that someone who judges an object to be ugly or non-beautiful is just as entitled to claim universal agreement for her state of mind as she would be if she judged it to be beautiful. But this suggestion is not an option on my view, since I do not see the states of finding something beautiful and finding it not-beautiful as symmetrical. Somene who judges something to be beautiful has an immediate and nonconceptual consciousness of her way of seeing the object as appropriate to it, but there is no counterpart state of disharmony involving a parallel claim to appropriateness. Instead there is simply the absence of pleasure, albeit in a context where pleasure might be expected, or where someone else has claimed that one ought to feel pleasure.

[11] Allison, Henry. *Kant's Theory of Taste*. Cambridge, 2001, 116f.

In a reply to Allison on this point,[12] I proposed seeing the problem about negative judgments of beauty in connection with the familar Frege-Geach problem for expressivism about normative terms, that of how such terms can appear in contexts other than those in which they are assertively applied, for example in the antecedents of conditionals or in cases where they are negated. I suggested what might be thought of as a quasi-realist answer to that problem, taking as my model for for a solution to the problem Kant's discussion of universal judgments like "roses are beautiful" or "All tulips are beautiful," which Kant calls aesthetically grounded logical judgments. Such judgments are possible, Kant says, because "an object's relation to taste can be made into a predicate of things of a certain general kind" ((KU, AA 05:285.16-17). I proposed that, even though in judging something to be beautiful we do not in the first instance ascribe a concept of beauty to the thing judged, we can derive from our judgment a second-order concept applying to the thing, namely the concept of calling for, or making appropriate a judgment of beauty. To say "all tulips are beautiful" on this view is to say something like "all tulips are such as to make appropriate judgments of beauty". Negative judgments of taste, I suggested, could be understood on that same model. To say that something is not beautiful is to say that it is not something which calls for or makes appropriate a judgment of beauty. If this approach worked, then it could be seen as offering a way of accounting for aesthetic disagreement. You and I disagree about whether something is beautiful because you make the second-order judgment that it calls for a judgment of beauty and I make the second-order judgment that it doesn't.

But I have come to see a problem with this approach to aesthetic disagreement, namely that it seems to fall foul of the autonomy of taste.[13] The problem is that in introducing the concept of *calling for a judgment of beauty* we have introduced something which looks very

[12] *The Normativity of Nature*, 108-110

[13] The problem is convincingly articulated in Hopkins, Robert: *Kant, Quasi-Realism, and the Autonomy of Aesthetic Judgment*. In *European Journal of Philosophy* 9/2 (2001), 166-189.

much like an objective property. It is indeed different from the kind of objective property which Ameriks and Guyer take to be ascribed in a judgment of beauty because it has a normative rather than a descriptive character. And it has a subjective aspect in that it contains an irreducible reference to a kind of response which we can make sense of only insofar as we can, ourselves, make judgments of beauty proper. Still, it seems to be a property which an object can have independently from an individual's response to that object. So, we might wonder, if this is a genuinely objective property, why shouldn't it be possible to argue that an object has or lacks it on the basis of considerations other than one's own pleasure or lack of pleasure in an object? For example, why shouldn't someone come to believe that an object has or lacks the property on the basis of the testimony of other people's pleasure or lack of pleasure, especially if she thinks of them as better educated than her about the relevant kind of object? We might begin to answer by saying that the positive assertion "This is beautiful" is never understood as expressing only the second-order judgment that an object calls for a judgment of beauty proper, but always as expressing either the first-order judgment on its own, or both judgments together. The first-order judgment, as so to speak the original source of the concept *calls for a judgment of beauty*, has priority when it comes to the interpretation of an assertion like "this is beautiful." But that does not go far enough in addressing the problem, since ordinary usage also prohibits asserting "This is not beautiful" if one hasn't seen the object oneself. So if "This is not beautiful" is understood as making the second order judgment that the thing does not call for a judgment of beauty, rather than as simply expressing one's absence of pleasure, then we have the question of why not only one's own lack of pleasure, but also someone else's lack of pleasure, could not serve as a ground for that judgment.

I do not know whether this problem is decisive against the quasi-realist approach, but in any case I want to put on the table a very different approach to the issue of disagreement which is not quasi-realist and which is independent of the attempt to address the Frege-Geach problem. This is to claim that, in order to account for aesthetic disagreement we do not need to suppose that one person judges the object to be beautiful and the other person judges it not to be beautiful. We could suppose instead that one person judges the object to be beautiful and the other simply refrains from judging it to be beautiful: responding to it either with indifference, with dislike or perhaps with a feeling of pleasure which she knows to be based on some interest of hers. Could this be enough to make sense of aesthetic disagreement? Well, one point in favour of this approach is that what we have at least constitutes disagreement in a sense which is stronger than the mere noncotenability which we find in the case of the agreeable. It is not just that you like the object and I either dislike it or feel indifferent towards it, as in the case of the agreeable. Rather, simply in experiencing the object and not liking it, I am resisting your claim that I ought to like it. If you say "This is beautiful" and I say "It leaves me cold" that is already, intuitively, a disagreement. And, again intuitively, it is more disagreement than there would have been if my saying "it leaves me cold" had simply been a response to your saying that you liked it or found it agreeable. For when I respond to your judgment of beauty with a claim of indifference, I am registering both that I have put myself in a position such that your judgment makes an immediate demand for my agreement, and that I am not conforming to the demand. In effect, then, I can be seen as rejecting your demand. I am like the negative counterpart of the young poet at §33, who "does not allow approval to be internally imposed on him" by people who find beautiful something which he himself does not like. Kant describes that person as simply "not finding the object beautiful": he does not describe him as making the judgment that

it is *not* beautiful. But presumably Kant still thinks of him as disagreeing with the those who praise the object as beautiful, even though what he seems to be doing is simply refraining from making a judgment of beauty in response to the judgments of beauty which are made by the others.

On this approach, to make sense of the kind of disagreement which Kant calls *Streit* – conflict, quarrel, argument – we do not need to invoke the symmetrical disagreement between someone, say the young poet, who judges that his poem is beautiful, and the friend who judges that it is not beautiful. Rather, it is enough for the poet to judge his poem beautiful, and for the friend simply to read the poem and to refrain from finding it beautiful. This sets up a situation in which both are motivated to try to remove the disagreement, either by coming to genuine agreement that the poem is beautiful – a state in which they both come to experience the poem in just the way that the poet does – or by the poet's abandoning his original judgment of beauty. The poet's motivation comes directly from the claim, implicit in his experience of the poem, that his experience is appropriate to the object and hence one which everyone should share. The friend's motivation is less direct, since she is not having the kind of experience which involves an immediate, nonconceptual claim that everyone should share that experience. But she still feels herself to be in a situation of tension or instability because she recognizes that she is not having a certain kind of experience which the poet takes it that she ought to have. So she is motivated to bring it about either that she comes to experience the poem in the same way as the poet does, or that the poet comes to experience the poem differently in a way which no longer carries a claim that everyone should share his way of experiencing it. On the second of these resolutions, there is no agreement in judgments as there is on the first. The conflict goes away, not because the two parties come to make the same judgment, but because neither party makes a

judgment which involves a claim on the other. In Kant's story, the disagreement between the young poet and his more sophisticated friends is resolved in this second way. The poet, presumably as a result of greater experience in reading poetry, comes to perceive his poem differently and so, as Kant puts it, "to depart from his previous judgment." That is to say, he ceases to feeling that the pleasure which he used to feel. From the point of view of his friends, this is an improvement on his earlier attitude: he has ceased to feel pleasure in his own youthful work because his judgment, in Kant's words, has been "sharpened by practice." But it could have happened the other way around. The friends could have come around to the young poet's way of seeing the poem, in which case they would have regarded their earlier selves as having failed – perhaps as a result of prejudices in part due to excessive sophistication – to recognize the young poet's genius. And even if it happened as Kant tells it, it would be open to us now, if we had the poem in front of us, to claim that the young poet should not have withdrawn his original, positive assessment of the poem – that, rather than his judgment having been sharpened by practice, it had been dulled by his desire to conform to the views of others and that he had wrongly turned away from the inspired work of his earlier years

One might worry that this solution does not do enough justice to the form aesthetic disagreements actually seem to take in real life, where one person will claim, say, that the film she and a friend just saw was beautiful and the other will respond not just with "I didn't like it" but "It was terrible." Moreover, often the person who thought it was terrible will try to point out things which bring about that the other comes to judge the film in the same way that she does. In such cases the disagreement does take the form of opposed positive and negative judgments in which each of the two people tries to get the other to see the object her way. Now the account I have just suggested does not rule out that aesthetic disagreement of this kind can happen. It

allows that people can make negative judgments of taste, perhaps on the model which I suggested in my response to the Frege-Geach problem. But it denies that the situation between the two opponents is symmetrical. The account I have offered commits me to saying that the person who says "it's terrible" is not entitled, even prima facie, to take her opinion to be one which everyone should share. A person is no more entitled to claim the universal validity of her negative judgment of taste than she is entitled to claim the universal validity of her headache, or – to stay closer to Kant – to her feeling of pleasure in the agreeable or displeasure in the disagreeable. [14] When a person fails to find something beautiful, or feels displeasure in it, she may in fact ascribe to it the pseudo-objective property of not being beautiful, and so claim that others ought to recognize the presence of that property, but this is not a claim to which she is ever entitled . By contrast, the person who finds an object beautiful is responding to it in the kind of way which does entitle her to claim that everyone ought to respond the same way, even though in particular cases her claim may be rejected by others or by herself at a later time. Very roughly, on this line of thought, we are entitled to reject demands for agreement made on us by people who find things beautiful, but we are not entitled to press demands that they dislike the things which we dislike. This feature of the account – the way it privileges positive judgments of beauty over negative ones – might seem problematic. But I think there are reasons to see this both as reflecting Kant's own view about the form which aesthetic disagreement takes, and as an appealing account of aesthetic disagreement in its own right. There is something attractive about the thought that the person who sees, or thinks she sees beauty, in an object has a kind of claim to agreement which is not shared by someone who dislikes it, even though both can express their ways of seeing the object in the form of judgments which have the appearance of objectivity.

[14] Here I am in sympathy with Reinhardt Brandt. See e.g. Brandt, Reinhardt, *Zur Logik des ästhetischen Urteils.* In *Kants Ästhetik/Kant's Aesthetics/L'esthetique de Kant.* Ed. Herman Parret. Berlin 1998, 229-245, 239.

I have been concerned in this paper with the question of how to make sense of the kinds of aesthetic disagreement which figure in Kant's discussion of the young poet and in related passages. But I shall end by saying that perhaps it is not as important to the study of Kant's aesthetics as it is often seen to be that we be able to make sense of the phenomenon of aesthetic disagreement. There can be a temptation to think that Kant emphasizes the normative and universally valid character of judgments of taste primarily in order to make sense of disagreements between different people as they arise in the evaluation of works of art. Certainly that is how it seems on the basis of the passages from the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment which we have been looking at and from other passages where Kant gives specific examples of judgments of beauty. But a somewhat different view emerges when we consider Kant's aesthetics from the perspective offered by the Introductions to the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant links judgments of beauty – especially about nature – with the idea of nature's purposiveness for our cognitive faculties, and of our capacity to come up with empirical concepts and laws in terms of which nature can be made comprehensible. That strand of Kant's thought suggests that the significance for him of the normativity and universal validity of judgments of beauty arises not in connection with the contrast between judging objects correctly as opposed incorrectly in respect of beauty, or determining which objects count as beautiful and which not, but rather in a more basic contrast between the idea of a subject's merely responding to an object, in a way that animals do, and her responding to it in a way which has a normative dimension, that is in a way distinctive of human beings.[15] The idea of a judgment of beauty as making a non-conceptual claim to its own appropriateness with respect to an object, and hence to universal agreement, would make sense even if no-one ever disagreed about whether anything was beautiful. It would serve simply as a contrast to a kind of judgment – a judgment of the

[15] For this contrast, see *The Normativity of Nature*, 4ff.

agreeable in the aesthetic domain, and perhaps a judgment of perception in the cognitive domain – that really amounted to nothing more than a brute response to an object without any appreciation on the subject's part of its normative significance either way.

A related point arises when we contrast the beauty of art with the beauty of nature. Aesthetic disagreement of the kind we have been considering, along with ideas about the improvement of taste and about people's judging one another as having good or bad taste, belong almost exclusively – perhaps exclusively without qualification – in the domain of art. When it comes to the beauty of nature, the phenomenon of aesthetic disagreement pretty much falls away, although the subjectivity and nonconceptuality of the judgment of beauty remain. I am not saying this to deny the challenge posed to my view, and other subjectivist views, by the kind of disagreement we see illustrated in the passages we have been looking at. And aesthetic disagreement is obviously of central importance for understanding Kant's philosophy of art, as opposed to his aesthetic theory more generally. But it is not clear that ascribing to Kant an intuitively plausible account of aesthetic disagreement has to be the touchstone for an understanding of Kant's views about beauty more generally. So while I think it is important to do justice to the issues raised by Kant's young poet, I also think it would be a mistake to put those issues at the center of our interpretation of Kant's aesthetics overall.