

In Defence of the One-Act View

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1. Introduction

Paul Guyer’s “One Act or Two?” revisits a fundamental issue in the interpretation of Kant’s aesthetics: that of the relation between the feeling of pleasure in a beautiful object and the judgment that the object is beautiful.¹ Kant describes the judgment of beauty as claiming the “universal validity” or “universal communicability” of one’s feeling of pleasure, which suggests that the pleasure must precede the judgment of beauty. But in §9 of the *Critique of Judgment*, designated the “key to the critique of taste,” he disclaims this suggestion: the “merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object... precedes the pleasure in it and is the ground of [the] pleasure.”² How are we to address this apparent contradiction?

¹ Paul Guyer, “One Act or Two? Hannah Ginsborg on Aesthetic Judgment,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, this issue.

² *Critique of Judgment* §9, 5:218. References to Kant’s works give volume and page number of the *Akademie* edition (Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–). Translations are mine except where indicated. Guyer suggests (“One Act or Two?,” 2) that my “unexplained retention” of the traditional translation of *Kritik der Urteilskraft* is motivated by interpretive considerations, in particular my collapsing the distinction between *Beurteilung* and *Urteil*. While I do in fact deny any significant distinction between the “judging” of an object to be beautiful the “judgment” that it is beautiful, this is not my reason for retaining the traditional translation of *Urteilskraft* as “judgment” rather than “power of judgment.” Rather, as I explained in my review of Guyer’s edition of the third Critique (Hannah Ginsborg, Review of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, *The Philosophical Review* 111 (3) (2002), 429-436), at 434n5, my reason is that “judgment” corresponds to Kant’s Latin equivalent for *Urteilskraft*, namely *iudicium* (see e.g. *Anthropology* at 7:199 and *Conflict of the Faculties* at 7:438). Sticking with

In his groundbreaking study of Kant's aesthetics, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Guyer proposed that we distinguish two acts of judgment, one which precedes the pleasure and one which follows it.³ The first act corresponds to Kant's notion of the "free play of the faculties," which Guyer understands as a psychological process in which the imagination synthesizes without concepts, giving rise to a feeling of pleasure. The second act is one in which the subject reflects on her feeling of pleasure to determine its origin. If she comes to recognize that her pleasure is due to the free play, then she is in a position to claim that everyone should share the pleasure, thus making a judgment of beauty. This solution to the problem posed by §9 was the centerpiece of a detailed and comprehensive account of Kant's aesthetic theory, notable both for the clarity and thoroughness with which Guyer delineated the interpretive problems posed by Kant's text, and for the boldness and ingenuity of the solutions he offered.

In my 1989 dissertation, *The Role of Taste in Kant's Theory of Cognition*, I argued that Guyer did not succeed in solving the interpretive problems he so convincingly articulated.⁴ I proposed an alternative

"judgment" also retains consistency with the standard translation of *Urteilkraft* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as making for a less unwieldy English title for the third Critique. Guyer claims that the choice of "power of judgment" preserves room for the distinction between *Beurteilung* and *Urteil*" ("One Act or Two," 2), but that distinction — always marked by "judging" as opposed to "judgment"— is preserved no matter how *Urteilkraft* is translated. It might make sense to diverge from "judgment" for *Urteilkraft* if there were a risk of confusion between "judgment" in the sense of *Urteilkraft* and "judgment" in the sense of *Urteil*, but context can be relied on to prevent that.

³ Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979). For convenience I supply also the page numbers corresponding to the second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). See especially 110-119 [97-103].

⁴ Hannah Ginsborg, *The Role of Taste in Kant's Theory of Cognition*, reprint of 1989 Harvard University PhD dissertation (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2016), chs. 1-2. My most detailed critique of the two-acts view is to be found here. The one-act alternative is developed further in some of the essays collected in Hannah Ginsborg, *The Normativity of Nature: Essays on Kant's Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), especially essays 2-5.

solution to the problem of §9 which dispensed with the need to distinguish two acts of judging. To judge an object to be beautiful, I argued, is to be in a state of mind which makes a non-conceptual claim to its own appropriateness with respect to the object judged, and hence to its own universal validity. Since, as I argued, such a state of mind constitutes a feeling of disinterested pleasure, a judgment of beauty claims its own universal validity, and, in so doing, the universal validity of the pleasure with which it can be identified. This explained how the judging could both “precede” the pleasure – in the sense of constituting it – and claim its universal communicability. As for the free play of the faculties, rather than understanding it as an episode distinct from the judging of the object to be beautiful, I proposed to identify it with that act of judging: a move which, it seemed to me, had the advantage of providing a clear and non-metaphorical explanation of an otherwise mysterious notion.

I have continued to hold this “one-act” view, largely because I think it represents the more most conservative solution to the problem of §9. When Kant answers the title question of §9 – “whether in the judgment of taste [*Geschmacksurteil*] the pleasure precedes the judging [*Beurteilung*] or the judging precedes the pleasure” – by saying that the “judging of the object precedes and is the ground of” the pleasure,” he gives no indication that the judging referred to is anything other than the judging under discussion in the previous eight sections, that is, the judging of an object to be beautiful. On the contrary, he says that the pleasure is consequent on the universal communicability of the subject’s state of mind in the object, a claim which, taken at face value, requires us to identify the relevant “judging” with the judging which has been at issue all along. Furthermore, the supposed distinction is nowhere registered in Kant’s technical terminology. Although he sometimes uses pairs of terms, such as *beurteilen* and *urteilen* (rendered in some translations as “estimate” and “judge” respectively) in ways which seem to line up with the distinction, he does not do so consistently. In *Kant and the Claims of Taste* Guyer acknowledged these points, but held that the distinction was nonetheless indispensable. “[T]hough Kant does not consistently distinguish between the “estimating” of an object and the “judging” of a pleasure, we must, for his theory is intelligible only if we distinguish two conditions for making the judgment of taste. The issuing of such a judgment depends both upon the occurrence of the mental activity which

actually produces an intersubjectively valid feeling of pleasure, and on the logically independent recognition of the intersubjectivity of that feeling” (my italics).⁵

A significant part of my case for the one-act view was, and remains, my rejection of the italicized claim. The supposed unintelligibility of the theory depends on the assumption that the pleasure has to be felt prior to the recognition that everyone ought to share it. I argued that we can avoid having to distinguish two acts of judgment if we drop that assumption, instead allowing that the recognition of the pleasure’s intersubjectivity or universal communicability is part of the pleasure itself. In “One Acts or Two,” however, Guyer reaffirms the assumption: “the pleasure in a beautiful object cannot be a product of its judgment that one’s own state of mind is communicable or intersubjectively valid, because it is a judgment that *one’s pleasure* is universally communicable, so the pleasure must be there to be judged.”⁶

Later in this paper I offer a direct challenge to Guyer’s assumption that the pleasure must precede the claim to its universal communicability, or, equivalently, that it cannot claim *its own* universal communicability. Before that, however, I address some of the other points he raises in defence of the two-acts view and against the one-act alternative. I see it as an important advantage of the one-act view that it allows for a more illuminating account of the overall project of the third Critique and of its philosophical importance.⁷ But for the purposes of this paper I will limit my defence of the one-act view to considerations local to Kant’s aesthetic theory, specifically those raised in “One Acts or Two.”

2. Is there textual evidence for the two-acts view?

⁵ *Claims of Taste*, 111 [98].

⁶ “One Act or Two?,” 4. I agree with Guyer that the pleasure cannot be a “product” of the judgment; the assumption I reject is that it must precede it, i.e. must be (already) there to be judged.

⁷ See the Introduction to *Normativity of Nature*.

Guyer describes his main argument for the two-acts view as both philosophical and textual.⁸ The philosophical aspect of the argument corresponds to the assumption I challenge: that the pleasure cannot claim its own universal communicability. In this section I argue that the passages he cites as textual evidence support the two-acts view only taken in conjunction with that assumption, and so do not constitute an independent ground for endorsing the two-acts view. I return to the assumption itself in section 7.

The first passage is from the Introduction. As with the other passages Guyer cites as evidence, I reproduce it as quoted in “One Acts or Two”; the italics are introduced by Guyer to clarify his reading, and Kant’s own emphases are marked in bold.)

Apprehension of forms in the imagination can never take place without the reflecting power of judgment, even if unintentionally, at least comparing them to its faculty for relating intuitions to concepts. Now if in this comparison the imagination...is unintentionally brought into accord with the understanding...through a given representation *and a feeling of pleasure is thereby aroused, then* the object must be regarded as purposive for the reflecting power of judgment...That object the form of which (not the material aspect of its representation, as sensation) in mere reflection (without any intention of acquiring a concept from it) is judged *as the ground* of a pleasure in the representation of such an object -- with its representation *this pleasure is also judged to be necessarily combined*, consequently not merely for the subject who apprehends this form but for everyone who judges at all.⁹

According to Guyer, “there are clearly two separable acts here, *judging the object* and thereby *arousing* the feeling of pleasure, and then *judging the pleasure* and issuing the judgment of beauty or taste. If the

⁸ “One Act or Two?,” 4.

⁹ *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction, VII, 5:190. The translation is drawn from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). This passage and others are cited as evidence for the two-acts view in *Claims of Taste*, 110-116 [98-103]; I discuss them in *Role of Taste*, 11-15.

pleasure does not succeed the former step, no claim to universal validity is in order, but if it does not precede the judgment of taste, the latter makes no sense.”¹⁰

However, I do not see here any commitment to two separable acts. The passage does indeed offer several descriptions of activities or processes which might appear on the face of it to be separable: (1) the pleasure’s being aroused by imagination’s “unintentional” accord with the understanding; (2) the object’s being regarded as purposive for reflective judgment; (3) the form of the object being judged [*beurteilen*], in mere reflection, as the ground of the pleasure; and (4) the pleasure’s being judged [*urteilen*] as necessarily combined with the representation of the object. But on the view I have proposed, these all pick out the same phenomenon, namely the subject’s entering into a pleasurable state of mind in which she is non-conceptually aware of a normative fit between that state of mind and the object, and hence of the universal validity of her pleasure. As we have just seen, Guyer implicitly rules out this reading of the passage on the grounds that, “if [the pleasure] does not precede the judgment of taste, the [claim to universal validity] makes no sense.” But that relies on the assumption I challenge.

The second passage is from §6, in which Kant says that if “the person making the judgment feels himself completely **free** with regard to the satisfaction that he devotes to the object” he “must *therefore* regard it as grounded in [conditions] that he can also presuppose in everyone else; *consequently* he must believe himself to have grounds for expecting a similar pleasure of everyone.”¹¹ It is not obvious to me why Guyer sees this as supporting the two-acts model, since, as I read the passage, each of the clauses characterizes an aspect of what Guyer views as the the second act; there is no mention of a distinct first act of judging through which the pleasure is produced. The most likely explanation is that Guyer assumes that “feeling oneself free” with regard to one’s pleasure, and thus regarding the pleasure as grounded in universally shared conditions, must presuppose that the pleasure has already been produced prior to the adoption of these attitudes. But that again reflects the assumption I am questioning. If we drop that

¹⁰ “One Act or Two?,” 5.

¹¹ *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §6, 5:211; italics added by Guyer.

assumption, it is left open that the experience of one's feeling of pleasure as free from any interest – and consequently as universally valid – might be part of the pleasure itself.

The third passage is from §9:

Now the judgment of taste, however, determines the object, independently of concepts, with regard to satisfaction and the predicate of beauty. The animation of both faculties (the imagination and the understanding) to an activity that is indeterminate but yet, through the stimulus of the given representation, in unison, namely that which belongs to a cognition in general, is the sensation whose universal communicability *is postulated by the judgment of taste*....A representation which, though singular and without comparison to others, nevertheless is in agreement with the conditions of universality, an agreement that constitutes the business of the understanding in general, brings the faculties of cognition into the well-proportioned disposition that we require for all cognition *and hence also regard as valid for everyone* (for every human being) who is determined to judge by means of understanding and sense in combination.¹²

Guyer glosses this as follows: “we have the “activity” of the imagination which leads to “satisfaction” and then the judgment that since the faculties of imagination and understanding are required for cognition in general, of which every (normal) human being is capable (under optimal conditions) the “predicate” of beauty can be attached to the object to express that the pleasure [the object] has produced in the subject is valid for everyone else as well. First, *Beurteilung*, then pleasure, then *Geschmacksurteil*, which is about that pleasure.”¹³ The word “*Beurteilung*” does not in fact occur in the quoted passage, but presumably Guyer is alluding to the “merely subjective (aesthetic) judging [*Beurteilung*]” which Kant described

¹² *Critique of Judgment*, §9, 5:219. Italics added by Guyer.

¹³ “One Act or Two?,” 5.

earlier as “preceding the pleasure and as its ground,”¹⁴ and it is indeed plausible to identify this with the free play.

However I see nothing in this passage which rules out identifying the activity of the imagination and understanding mentioned in the second sentence – that is, the *Beurteilung* – with the act of “postulating” the universal communicability of one’s sensation by (or in) a *Geschmacksurteil*. Guyer’s gloss implies a sequence: first *Beurteilung*, then pleasure, then *Geschmacksurteil*. But that gloss is already questionable given that, in the passage, Kant simply identifies the *Beurteilung* with the pleasure: “the animation of... imagination and understanding...*is* the sensation whose universal communicability is postulated by the judgment of taste” (my italics). If, as I maintain, the pleasure claims its own universal communicability, then it is unproblematic to identify it, further, with the judgment of taste. So, again, the passage is evidence for the two-acts view only given the assumption I challenge.

Finally, there is a passage which Guyer cites in connection with what he takes to be Kant’s explanation of erroneous judgments of taste. According to Guyer, Kant sees such judgments as stemming from a person’s feeling a pleasure which is due to some source other than the free play of the faculties, but wrongly judging that the pleasure is due to the free play and hence one which everyone should share. Mistakes like this are possible because the judgment that one’s pleasure is due to one source or another is an empirical judgment and so, inevitably, uncertain. Guyer sees this account as indicated in a passage in which Kant distinguishes the empirical judgment “that I perceive and judge [*beurteile*] an object with pleasure” from the “*a priori* judgment [*Urteil*] that I find it beautiful, i.e. that I may require that satisfaction from everyone as necessary.”¹⁵ This passage, Guyer says, “clearly presupposes the two-act theory of judgment: first there is the *Beurteilung* of the object, which, if it produces a harmonious free play of imagination and understanding, produces pleasure; then there is, that is, one can make, the empirical judgment that one’s pleasure or ‘satisfaction’ is indeed due to that source, in which case one can

¹⁴ *Critique of Judgment*, §9, 5:218.

¹⁵ *Critique of Judgment*, §37, 5:289.

further “require that satisfaction of everyone as necessary.”¹⁶ And he goes on to say that “the second stage of this process makes no sense unless there has been a first-stage activity of judging the object which has resulted in the pleasure.”¹⁷

I will mention two difficulties I see for Guyer’s reading of the passage. First, it seems to depend on identifying the empirical judgment mentioned by Kant, namely “that I perceive and judge an object with pleasure,” with the empirical judgment Guyer invokes as part of the two-acts view, namely that my pleasure is due to the free play of imagination and understanding. But a judgment *that* I feel pleasure is different from a judgment *about the source* of the pleasure I feel. Second, the claim that the passage presupposes the two-acts view, as in the case of the passages previously considered, depends on the assumption that a subject cannot judge her feeling of pleasure to be universally communicable unless the pleasure is already there prior to that act of judging. And that is just the assumption which, in section 7, I will give grounds for rejecting.

3. Normative demand or ideal prediction?

One of the objections I originally raised to Guyer’s two-acts view is that his second act of judging, one of reflecting on the causal origins of one’s pleasure, could not support the normative demand for agreement which is made by a judgment of beauty. Guyer responds both by arguing that this reflects Kant’s own view rather than constituting an objection to his interpretation, and by questioning my claim that the judgment of beauty makes a normative demand for agreement as opposed to expressing an expectation – albeit one conditional on one’s having correctly identified the causal origin of one’s own pleasure – that everyone will share one’s pleasure. Regarding the latter, he observes that some of the

¹⁶ “One Acts or Two?,” 6.

¹⁷ “One Acts or Two?,” 6.

language Kant uses to describe our attitude to the pleasure of others – *zumuten* and *ansinnen* – is compatible with this non-normative understanding of the claim that is made.¹⁸

I will be brief here, because I have discussed the question at length elsewhere.¹⁹ I will mention only that Guyer seems here, as he did in *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, to assume that if the demand is normative it would have to have a moral dimension. This overlooks the kind of normative claim made, for example, by a cognitive judgment: “A singular judgment of experience from someone who perceives a movable drop of water in a rock-crystal rightly demands that everyone else should find it so [*es ebenso finden müsse*].”²⁰ Presumably the demand is not merely a prediction that everyone else *will* share one’s response to the rock-crystal; but nor is there an implication that lack of agreement would be a moral (or other kind of practical, e.g. prudential) failure. We have here a distinctive kind of normativity associated with the exercise of our cognitive capacities rather than with desire or the will. And it is just this kind of normative demand, Kant goes on to say, which is made by a judgment of beauty: “in the same way, someone who feels pleasure in mere reflection on the form of an object without regard to concepts... rightly makes claim [*Anspruch*] to everyone’s agreement.”²¹ Once we recognize that a claim or demand of this kind need not be a moral one, there appears to be no reason not to take Kant’s normative language at face value, whether or not some of his vocabulary admits of a non-normative interpretation.

4. The “Everything is beautiful” worry

In addition to the objection mentioned above, Guyer reads me as objecting to his view on the grounds that it implies our feeling disinterested pleasure in every object of knowledge. As he understands

¹⁸ “One Act or Two?,” 7.

¹⁹ *Role of Taste*, 51-56; see also *Normativity of Nature*, 38-39.

²⁰ *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction VII, 5:191.

²¹ *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction VII, 5:191.

the objection, this is an implication of his identification of the free play with the first two stages of the “threefold synthesis” required for all cognition. Since these first two stages take place whenever we cognize an object, according to the objection, the view has the consequence that every cognition should involve a feeling of pleasure and so (potentially) give rise to the judgment that the object cognized is beautiful. He responds by pointing out that, on his view, we feel pleasure only if these first two stages take place without the third stage, that of recognition in a concept.²²

This response to the objection he describes seems to me to be quite legitimate. But it does not address the objection I actually make in the passage he cites.²³ I object there that the view faces a dilemma, of which the “everything is beautiful” consequence is just one horn. Guyer’s response to the “everything is beautiful” objection opens his view to the other horn of the dilemma: that our entitlement to claim universal agreement for our cognitive states does not carry over to the aesthetic case. It is indeed necessary for cognition that the first two stages of the three-fold synthesis take place, so that if the free play is identified with those two stages *simpliciter*, we should be able to claim the universal communicability of our state of mind every time we experience it. But it is not necessary for cognition that these stages take place *without recognition in a concept*. So on the response which Guyer gives here, which is of a piece with the “metacognitive” reading of the free play which he goes on to mention, it appears that Kant’s deduction of taste – his argument for the universal communicability of one’s feeling of pleasure in a beautiful object fails to go through. (And it should be noted that this is independent of the question, raised in section 3, whether the claim to universal communicability is a normative demand or a prediction.)

²² “One Act or Two?,” 7-8.

²³ *Normativity of Nature*, 63.

The “everything is beautiful” worry reappears later in Guyer’s discussion, when he claims that it is my view, not his, which succumbs to this objection.²⁴ Guyer notes that I address an objection regarding the “vacuousness” of the judgment of beauty on my view by pointing out that a state which nonconceptually claims its own universal communicability has a specific phenomenological character, so that, in claiming its universal communicability, I am claiming that everyone should see it *like this*. As I put it in the course of the discussion to which Guyer alludes: “the experience of the beautiful consists in our responding imaginatively to the object in some phenomenologically specific way which we cannot adequately put into words...but which we experience—in a way integral to that very response—as something which is called for by, or which fits, the object.”²⁵ Guyer argues that something like this applies also to his experience of the wastebasket in his office, about which, after having given a description of its visible features, I can only say “it looks like *this*” (signalling the phenomenological specificity) and that “it should look like *this* to you too.” Why does it not follow that he is experiencing the wastebasket as beautiful?

The answer is that, unless he in fact judges the wastebasket to be beautiful – something which we would not want to regard, on Kant’s view, either as impossible or as illegitimate – he is not taking there to be anything about his experience which is both universally communicable and incapable of conceptual articulation. So the claim implicit in his experience, that everyone ought to see the wastebasket the way he does, allows of being exhaustively grounded in conceptual terms (“everyone ought to see it as containing plastic wrapping, because it contains plastic wrapping,” etc.). Whereas in the experience of the beautiful, even though some universally communicable aspects of the experience can be conceptually grounded (“everyone ought to see it as a purple orchid because it is a purple orchid”) we are aware of something further about our experience which we take to be called for by the object even though it does not represent it as having some objective feature. For most of us, our experience of wastebaskets and the

²⁴ “One Act or Two?,” 11-12.

²⁵ *Normativity of Nature*, 126.

like does not have that feature, since there does not strike us as being any more to the experience of the object –leaving aside idiosyncratic features such as the wastebasket’s looking blurry because I took off my glasses, or my feeling dizzy from staring at it too long – than can be captured by an exhaustive description of its objective properties.²⁶

5. The problem of error

Guyer faults my view on the grounds that it cannot account for erroneous judgments of beauty. Now in fact it is somewhat controversial whether Kant’s theory can or should allow for erroneous judgments of beauty, given that judgments of beauty are not supposed to be objective and so cannot be mistaken in the sense of being false. However it is uncontroversial that Kant wants to allow for aesthetic disagreement and for the criticism of another person’s taste (or of one’s own taste at an earlier time), and these arguably imply at least the imputation of error in judgments of beauty. Can the one-act view allow for this? According to Guyer it cannot, because an erroneous judgment of taste is one in which I misidentify the source of a feeling of pleasure which I have, and so either claim that it is universally valid when it is not, or fail to claim that it is universally valid when it is.²⁷ For this to be possible the feeling of pleasure has to be distinct from the claim of universal validity.

But it is not clear why we should have to understand the imputation of error in the way Guyer suggests. It seems to me that the one-act view allows for a perfectly straightforward way of imputing aesthetic error to someone who either makes or refrains from making a judgment of beauty. If I find an

²⁶ Because this view is structurally analogous to Guyer’s response to the same objection, it might be asked how my view avoids the second horn of the dilemma I posed for Guyer. An answer is suggested in *Normativity of Nature*, 129-130.

²⁷ “One Act or Two?,” 12.

object beautiful, thus feeling pleasure in it, and you say sincerely that it leaves you cold, I can intelligibly regard you as in error because you fail to make a judgment of beauty in circumstances in which, at least as I see it, such a judgment is called for. Conversely, you can regard me as being in error for making a judgment of beauty in a situation where – as I see it, given my own lack of pleasure in the object – a judgment of beauty is not called for. We ascribe error, on this view, when we see others taking the “wrong” things to be beautiful, or failing to take the “right” things to be beautiful – which is to say, when they fail to share our disinterested pleasure in the things we take to be beautiful but instead feel disinterested pleasure in things which we do not ourselves find beautiful.²⁸

This account is closer than Guyer’s to our ordinary ways of thinking about aesthetic criticism and disagreement because it locates the target of criticism in our capacity to have appropriate feelings under appropriate circumstances, rather than in our capacity to identify the sources of our feelings. On Guyer’s account of error, if I find an object beautiful and you think that I am wrong to do so, you are taking exception not to my feelings about the object, but rather to my psychological acuity or conscientiousness in tracing my feelings to their proper source. But on the ordinary way of thinking, your criticism of my taste is aimed at my feelings themselves, and I am likely to feel at fault (if I take the criticism to heart) not for having misidentified my liking for an object, but simply for having liked it in the first place. Relatedly, Guyer’s account seems unable to explain the converse imputation of error, in which I criticize you for failing to share my pleasure in an object which I find beautiful. Because you are precisely *not* feeling pleasure, and so there is nothing for you to misidentify, Guyer’s account does not explain how I can impute any kind of error to you. But we do in fact often criticize others simply for failing to share our

²⁸ I discuss this topic further in “Kant’s ‘Young Poet’ and the Subjectivity of Aesthetic Judgment,” forthcoming in Violetta L. Waibel and Margit Ruffing (eds.), *Proceedings of the 12th International Kant Congress: Nature and Freedom* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter).

pleasure in the things we find beautiful, and this is something which a satisfactory account of aesthetic error should accommodate.

6. Kant's "transcendental explanation" of pleasure

As Guyer notes, I support my view by appeal to a number of passages in which Kant describes pleasure as having a self-maintaining or self-grounding character. Guyer understands me here as ascribing to Kant a view on which feeling pleasure is being disposed to continue in one's present state, and towards the end of "One Act or Two?" he expresses sympathy with this reading, but he points out that the dispositional reading is incompatible with my view of pleasure in the beautiful as a kind of judgment.²⁹

I am puzzled by this objection because, in one of the two discussions from which Guyer quotes,³⁰ I specifically deny that he has a view of this kind for pleasure in the beautiful (although I leave the question open for other kinds of pleasure). Guyer claims that I identify the "self-maintaining" structure of pleasure with having "a desire or inclination to remain in one's present mental state,"³¹ but in fact I go on to argue that desire or inclination cannot be involved in the case of pleasure in the beautiful, so that Kant's talk of self-maintenance or self-grounding has to be understood in a different way. On the alternative I propose, this means interpreting it not in causal or temporal terms – e.g. as a matter of the subject's state impelling her to remain in that state by generating a desire to remain in it – but rather in normative terms. Because the subject's state is one in which she recognizes that she should be in that state, yet without recognizing the "should" as grounded in objective features of the thing perceived, we can describe it as having a self-grounding character. Thus when Kant defines pleasure, at §10, as "the

²⁹ "One Act or Two?," 10.

³⁰ *Normativity of Nature*, 43-44.

³¹ *Normativity of Nature*, 43, quoted by Guyer at "One Acts or Two," 10.

consciousness of the causality of a representation in respect of the state of the subject, to maintain it in the same state,”³² the “consciousness of causality” in the case of pleasure in the beautiful is the consciousness of my state’s so to speak “telling me” that I should be in that state with respect to the object, that is, of its making me aware that I should be in that state. This is quite different from my merely being disposed to remain in my present state, whether blindly or because I am conscious of a desire to remain in it.

7. Can a feeling of pleasure claim its own universal communicability?

I turn finally to what I think the crux of my disagreement with Guyer. Guyer thinks it is out of the question for a feeling of pleasure to claim its own universal communicability or universal validity with respect to an object. But this is not obvious. At least some philosophers have characterized at least some kinds of feeling as making claims about their own correctness: for example Jonathan Lear, citing Aristotle among others, describes fear as making “an *implicit claim* that it is an *appropriate* response to the situation.”³³ And as long as we understand the claim to universal communicability as normative rather than predictive,³⁴ such a claim plausibly implies also a claim that others in that situation should have that feeling.. Why shouldn’t what Lear describes for fear apply also to our affective response to a beautiful object? In *Kant and the Claims of Taste* Guyer argued that, for Kant, pleasure in the beautiful is “opaque” rather than having intentional content, and in “One Act or Two?” he suggests that it is a disposition. Both views of pleasure are indeed incompatible with the idea of pleasure’s claiming its own

³² *Critique of Judgment*, §10, 5:220; Kant’s emphasis omitted.

³³ Jonathan Lear, *Freud* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 33.

³⁴ Of course Guyer denies this (see section 3) and if that is the primary reason for his denial that the pleasure can claim its own universal validity, then it is the true crux of our disagreement. But I believe that his denial is motivated by more than this.

universal communicability. But it would take more than that to dismiss the idea as simply out of the question, especially since the denial of intentionality to pleasure is controversial.³⁵

One might grant the intentional character of pleasure and still have qualms about the self-referential character of the claim. How can a state of mind make a claim *about itself*? Doesn't it have to be there already to be the object of the claim? But the question, of course, is what Kant thinks, and his acceptance of this kind of self-referentiality is indicated by a passage from the Introduction cited in Section 3: "A singular judgment of experience from someone who perceives a movable drop of water in a rock-crystal rightly demands that everyone else should find it so [*es ebenso finden müssse*]."³⁶ "Finding it so," is presumably judging, just as the original perceiver does, that there is a movable drop of water in the rock-crystal, so the judgment claims its own universal validity. And we see the same kind of self-referentiality in his characterizations of the claim to universal validity made by a judgment of beauty: "judgments of taste... lay claim to necessity and say, not that everyone does so judge... but that everyone *ought* to so judge."³⁷ While Kant's point here is to emphasize the normativity of the demand, I quote the passage to indicate that, because the "so" refers to the very judgment which makes the claim to necessity, the judgment demands universal agreement *with itself*.³⁸

Now on the one-act view this applies immediately to the case of pleasure because, on that view, to feel disinterested pleasure in a beautiful object just is to judge it to be beautiful (and, furthermore, for one's faculties to be in "free play"). But Guyer resists that identification. I have already mentioned one possible reason why, namely his denial that pleasure, for Kant, can have intentional content. Another possible reason concerns his conception of what a judgment [*Urteil*] is, namely "the assertion of a

³⁵ See for example Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 53-54.

Note also that the definition of pleasure at §10 quoted in the previous section seems to imply intentionality: pleasure is "consciousness *of*" a certain kind of causality.

³⁶ *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction VII, 5:191. See also §19 of the *Prolegomena*, at 4:299.

³⁷ *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction VII, 5:191.

³⁸ See also section X of the First Introduction, 20: 239.

proposition or the proposition asserted.”³⁹ If we understand judgments exclusively in terms of propositions, or require that they involve assertion, then it will certainly seem like a stretch to suppose that a feeling of pleasure could ever qualify as a judgment.

However, Guyer’s insistence that judgments have propositional content suggests an overly narrow construal of Kant’s notion of a judgment. The very fact that Kant allows that there can be judgments of beauty while denying that they are objective or have conceptual content – along with his willingness to allow for “judgments of perception” in the *Prolegomena* and “judgments of the agreeable” in the third Critique – suggests that his conception of a judgment encompasses more than assertions of propositional content. Consider someone who comes upon a flowering tree or a painting and has the kind of experience that she would naturally express by exclaiming “That’s beautiful!” It is not unreasonable, whether or not she says those words, to describe her as having “made a judgment of beauty” just as we might say that she has found the object beautiful, taken it to be beautiful, or experienced it as beautiful. Nothing more seems to be needed to qualify her experience as a judging of the object to be beautiful, or a judgment of beauty. Yet it is also not unreasonable to describe that same experience as a feeling of pleasure in the object.

Now Guyer might respond here that the experience I have just described, although it might be a “judgment” in some broad sense encompassing products of his first act of reflective judging, cannot be the “judgment of beauty” proper, since it cannot make a claim to universal agreement. Such claims, he might hold, can belong only to public assertions of something’s beauty. But I would argue that they belong also, and indeed paradigmatically, to the underlying experiences. Our unwillingness to retrench from “That’s beautiful” to “That’s beautiful *to me*,” as we might do in the case of the merely agreeable (see §7 of the *Critique of Judgment*), reflects its being part of the very experience of the beautiful that we experience the object as making that experience appropriate and so (implicitly) calling for it from all perceivers. So although Kant might sometimes bring out the distinctive features of the experience by

³⁹ “One Act or Two?,” 2.

reference to the public statements which give voice to the experience, it is the experience itself – pleasure in the beautiful – which has first claim to be called the judgment of beauty proper.

I will mention three sources of textual evidence for this last claim, and, more generally, for the identification of pleasure in the beautiful with the judgment of beauty. First, there is the rock-crystal passage already cited in this section and in §3. Kant immediately follows his claim that someone who perceives the water-droplet in the rock-crystal “demands...that everyone else should find it so” by saying “In just the same way, someone who feels pleasure in mere reflection...on the form of an object, although *this judgment [Urteil]* is empirical and a singular judgment, rightly makes claim to everyone’s agreement” (my italics).⁴⁰ Here there is no reference to a public statement that the object is beautiful. Furthermore, “this judgment” appears to refer to the pleasure, so that the passage implicitly identifies the pleasure with the judgment of beauty.⁴¹

Second, there are a number of passages in which Kant describes us as judging “by means of” [*vermittelst*] a feeling of pleasure, in contexts which suggest that the “judging” he has in mind is that associated with the judgment of beauty proper. In particular, at section VIII of the First Introduction, he raises the question “whether [the aesthetic faculty of reflection] judges [*urteilen*] [about the subjective purposiveness of the object]...only *by means of* the pleasure or displeasure in it [*dabei*], or even [*sogar*] *about* it, so that the judgment [Urteil] at the same time [*zugleich*] determines that pleasure or displeasure must be connected with the representation of the object” (Kant’s emphasis).⁴² The continuation makes clear that he endorses the second alternative. We judge, that is, by means of a feeling of pleasure; and in making that judgment – that is, in feeling the pleasure by means of which we judge – we judge that that very pleasure is necessarily connected with the representation of the object, which is to say, one which all

⁴⁰ *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction VII, 5:193.

⁴¹ If it does not refer to the pleasure, then it most likely refers to the “mere reflection”; but either way it refers to what Guyer categorizes as “aesthetic response” rather than to some further judgment over and above that response.

⁴² First Introduction VIII, 20:229. The claim that we judge “by means of” the feeling of pleasure is made also at section VII of the Introduction, 5:193.

perceivers of the object should share. So although Kant does not here explicitly identify the pleasure with the judgment of beauty proper, he does say that the judgment is made by means of a feeling of pleasure – implying that having that feeling is a way of making the judgment⁴³ – and he does not shy away from the *prima facie* paradoxical implication that this judgment also makes a claim about the pleasure through which it is made.

Third, if we do not identify the pleasure with the judgment, it is very hard to make sense of those passages mentioned earlier in this section in which Kant describes the judgment of beauty as claiming its own universal validity. How, otherwise, are we to reconcile these with the judgment's claiming the universal validity of a feeling of pleasure? On the two-acts view, the judgment must make two distinct claims: first, that everyone should feel pleasure in the object and second, that they should agree with my judgment, that is, claim the universal validity of the pleasure they feel. But Kant treats these claims interchangeably, and he offers no indication of how the second claim, as understood on the two-acts view, could be legitimate. It is understandable on the two-acts view how, despite the concern raised in Section 4, Kant might think that my attribution of the pleasure to the free play entitles me to claim its universal validity: the free play might be thought to be a condition of all cognition. But why should he think that I am also entitled to claim the universal validity of my judgment, given that this involves demanding not just that everyone feel the pleasure, but that, like me, they correctly identify their pleasure as due to the free play? The capacity to experience the free play might be a condition of cognition, but the capacity to identify the sources of my various feelings of pleasure certainly is not. This problem does not arise on the one-act view, since the claim to the universal validity of my pleasure is *eo ipso* a claim to the universal validity of the judgment itself, and no further justification is needed.

⁴³ Guyer understands “by means of” as implying that the pleasure must precede the judgment (*Claims of Taste*, 112 [99]), but I think it is compatible with the identity of the pleasure and the judgment. If I alert you to my presence by means of a knock on the door, my knocking on the door just is my alerting you to my presence, not a distinct action or event which precedes it.

I turn now to the supposed phenomenological implausibility of identifying the pleasure with the judgment. According to Guyer these can come apart: “I might experience pleasure in a beautiful object now and only later ask myself whether the object was really beautiful...or never ask myself that question at all.”⁴⁴ This does not ring true to me. At least if the pleasure I experience is the kind of pleasure I would naturally express by “That’s beautiful!” – think here of seeing a rainbow or a sunset – then my experiencing the pleasure is already my finding the object beautiful. I might later ask “Was it really beautiful?” but – as indeed suggested by the word “really” in Guyer’s example – I am not taking my first pass at a judgment of beauty about the object, but rather second-guessing a judgment I have already made. What makes Guyer’s claim seem more phenomenologically plausible is his gloss on that question, namely that it asks “whether others should be expected to experience the same pleasure I did.”⁴⁵ He is right that, when I experience pleasure in the beautiful, I do not necessarily think about how other people will, or even should, react to what I am perceiving. But that is compatible with what I think Kant has in mind when he characterizes judgments of beauty as making a claim to universal validity, namely that the experience of pleasure in the beautiful intrinsically involves my taking the object to make that experience appropriate. It is part of the phenomenology of pleasure in the beautiful that I do not experience it as floating free of the object – as simply caused by the object in the way that loud music can cause a headache or the view of blood a feeling of nausea – but rather as something which is called for or demanded by the object, in something like the way that a visibly green or square object calls for the perception of the object as green or square. And that demand is by default universal, since I do not experience it as depending on factors peculiar to me.

9. Conclusion

⁴⁴ “One Act or Two?,” 12.

⁴⁵ “One Act or Two?,” 12.

I argued in section 2 that the textual evidence Guyer offers for the two-acts view depends on the assumption that a feeling of pleasure cannot claim its own universal communicability. If the considerations in section 7 are correct, then that assumption must be rejected. This leaves room for the one-act view which, as I have also argued, has considerable textual support and is also intrinsically more plausible than Guyer and others have maintained. I am grateful to Guyer, both for his 1979 book, which put the third Critique on the map of analytic Kant studies, and for his contributions to the ensuing debates, in particular his vigorous critique of my own view. While I do not take myself to have conclusively settled the question “one act or two?” I hope to have shown that the one-act view remains a serious contender.