

Forthcoming in Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy,  
Rebecca Kukla (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Thinking the Particular as Contained under the Universal

Hannah Ginsborg, Dept. of Philosophy, U.C. Berkeley

July 2004

In a well-known passage from the Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgment, Kant defines the power or faculty of judgment [Urteilkraft] as "the capacity to think the particular as contained under the universal" (Introduction IV, 5:179).<sup>1</sup> He then distinguishes two ways in which this faculty can be exercised, namely as determining or as reflecting. These two ways are defined as follows: "If the universal (the rule, the principle, the law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it... is determining. But if merely the particular is given, for which the universal is to be found, then judgment is merely reflecting" (ibid.) As Kant goes on to make clear, the Critique of Judgment is particularly concerned with judgment in its capacity as reflecting rather than determining. It is concerned, that is, with how we are to find universals (which he glosses as rules, principles, or laws) for given particulars.

Despite the fact that the term "concept" does not appear in this set of definitions, Kant's discussions of judgment elsewhere make it clear that this faculty can be identified at least in part with our capacity to think particular objects under concepts, in particular empirical concepts.<sup>2</sup> The

---

<sup>1</sup>All references to Kant's works, except for the Critique of Pure Reason, give the volume and page number of the Akademie edition of Kant's collected writings (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1902-), with other details as appropriate. References to the Critique of Pure Reason give the usual A and B pagination. All translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> See especially section V of the First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment, 20:211-216.

sense of "universal" [allgemein], then, would appear to be the same sense that is implied in Kant's characterization of a concept as a "universal" (or as it is sometimes translated, a "general") representation (Logic §1, 9:91). To say that a concept is universal or general is to say that it is "common to several objects" (ibid.), and hence contrasts with an intuition, which is a singular representation. The question of how we are to think the particular as contained under the universal would thus appear to be the question of how we can grasp an individual thing under a concept, that is, how we can think it as having a feature that can at least in principle be shared with other objects.<sup>3</sup> And reflecting judgment more specifically would be concerned with the question not of how we can apply concepts which we already have, but how we can arrive at concepts in the first place.

There is, however, another, apparently distinct sense of "universal" which is also invoked by Kant in describing the exercise of judgment, more specifically judgment in its capacity as reflecting. In particular, Kant uses this sense of "universal" when he describes the claim to agreement made by a judgment of beauty, although he makes clear that this same claim is made by cognitive judgments also (see for example Critique of Judgment, Introduction VII, 5:191). "Universality" in this sense means, as he puts it, "validity for everyone" (§8, 5:215). The pleasure in an object expressed in a judgment of beauty is "universal" (§6, 5:211) because, in experiencing it, I take it that everyone -- all human beings -- ought to feel the same pleasure when confronted with the same object. This second sense of "universal" is unlike the first in that it alludes, not to a plurality of objects, but rather to a plurality of subjects. Saying that my judgment of beauty is universal in this sense -- or as Kant also puts it, universally

---

<sup>3</sup> There is also a related question of how we can think a particular concept or law under a higher-level concept or law; I leave this question aside in the present paper.

valid -- is a matter of saying that it should be shared by everyone who judges the object.<sup>4</sup>

My aim in this paper is to sketch a connection between these two senses of "universality." I want to suggest that when Kant speaks of judgment as "thinking the particular as contained under the universal" he has the second as well as the first sense of universality in mind. "Thinking the particular under the universal" means not only thinking of an object as having a feature shared in common with a multiplicity of other objects, but also thinking of one's own particular response to an object as universal or universally valid, as one does in a judgment of taste. More specifically, I want to suggest that the second, intersubjective, sense of universality is more fundamental, in that universality in this second sense makes possible universality in the first sense. It is only because we can think of our responses to objects as "universal" in the sense of being intersubjectively valid, that we are capable of thinking particular objects under universals, in the sense of subsuming them under concepts which capture what they have in common with other objects.<sup>5</sup>

## I

I want to begin laying out this connection by describing a familiar problem which arises for Kant in connection with the first kind of universality, a problem which I shall refer to as the problem of empirical universality or empirical generality. The problem is that of how to account for the possession of empirical concepts - that is, concepts that are

---

<sup>4</sup> In their translation of the Critique of Judgment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews record the distinction between these senses by using "general" for the first, and "universal" for the second, although with some exceptions (see the translators' notes at 8 and 66). In discussing Kant I will mostly use "universal" for both senses, but I will sometimes use "general" for the first, for example in discussing Hume.

<sup>5</sup> I will be defending this claim only for empirical concepts, although I believe that it holds also for the pure concepts of the understanding.

acquired on the basis of experience as opposed to originating a priori in our cognitive faculties. Experience for Kant consists in the first instance of those representations that come to us because of the way in which our senses are affected, that is, sensible intuitions. And as Kant emphasizes, sensible intuitions are, in themselves, singular. To the extent that we regard experience as consisting in sensible intuitions alone, experience can acquaint us only with individual things, not with features or properties that they possess in common with other things. Experience can be the source only of singular representations, not of representations that are general or universal.

So far, this statement of the problem is over-simple. For as Kant makes clear in the Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason, experience involves not just the reception of representations in sensibility, but an activity of imagination, called synthesis, through which the manifold of sensible impressions is given order and unity. Experience, understood as the product of this activity, still consists in intuitions, that is of singular representations, but these intuitions are structured or synthesized by the imagination in a way that allows for the representation of generality. Specifically, Kant holds, the synthesis of imagination proceeds according to rules or schemata, some of which are a priori and some of which are empirical. It is in virtue of the a priori rules that our intuitions come to represent an objective world of causally interacting substances standing in spatio-temporal relations to one another. These rules are the schemata in virtue of which the pure concepts of understanding are applicable to experience. But there are also rules or schemata corresponding to our empirical concepts, and it is in virtue of their accordance with these rules that our intuitions come to represent objects as having determinate empirical features, for example as having qualities like red or belonging to kinds like

dog or house. If we consider experience as consisting not just in raw unsynthesized data, but rather as the product of our imaginative activity, then it would seem that experience does make possible the representation of empirical features. For in that case it would seem that we can arrive at empirical concepts by reflecting on, and thus making explicit, the rules governing our imaginative activity.

But while this qualification is necessary if we are to understand Kant's position, it does not resolve the problem. For now we are faced with the question of the source of these rules. The rules themselves, it would seem, cannot derive from experience regarded as the product of imaginative activity, since they are required for the possibility of this activity and of the experience to which it gives rise. But since they are no less general or universal than the concepts which they are supposed to make possible, it is no less problematic to regard them as derived from the raw material of sensibility.

We can get clearer about the problem by looking at the passage where Kant appears to offer his most explicit account of the formation of empirical concepts. This is §6 of the Logic, where Kant describes what he calls the "logical acts" of comparison, reflection and abstraction. He illustrates these acts, which he ascribes to the understanding, in the following often-quoted example:

I see e.g. a spruce, a willow and a linden. In first comparing these objects among themselves, I notice that they are different from one another with respect to the trunk, the branches, the leaves and so forth; but now I go on to reflect only on what they have in common, the trunk, the branches, the leaves themselves; and I abstract from their size, shape and so forth; thus I receive [bekommen] a concept of tree.

(§6, note 1; 9:94-95)

The idea behind this example seems to be that we acquire the concept of a tree by being presented with a finite number of trees and noting both the features that differentiate them (for example the shapes and sizes of their respective leaves and branches) and the features which they have in common (for example the fact that they have leaves and branches in the first place). By abstracting from the features which differentiate them and attending to the common features we arrive at the concept of a tree, which presumably can be characterized as the concept of a thing with leaves, branches and a trunk.<sup>6</sup>

But this example does not yield a satisfying account of how we arrive at empirical concepts. In the first place, the example assumes that we are capable at the outset of recognizing what is presented to us as having leaves, branches and a trunk, and this would seem to presuppose that we possess the concepts leaf, branch and trunk. So we need to explain the acquisition of these concepts on the basis of further concepts, and a regress threatens. Now it might be supposed that Kant is in fact committed to the view that sensibility gives us basic features such as colour and shape, and that the operations of comparison, reflection and abstraction are responsible for the formation of more sophisticated concepts from these basic ones. On this supposition, Kant holds something like the compositional view of concepts suggested by Locke's distinction between simple and complex ideas, a distinction taken over by Berkeley and Hume. Sensibility is capable of giving us certain basic features, or respects in which objects resemble one another; imaginative or intellectual activity is required only in the

---

<sup>6</sup>See Béatrice Longuenesse's helpful discussion in Kant and the Capacity to Judge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 115-116; I agree with her view that comparison, reflection and abstraction should be seen as aspects of a single activity. For other discussions of this passage see Robert Pippin, Kant's Theory of Form (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 112ff; Hannah Ginsborg, "Lawfulness without a Law" (Philosophical Topics 25, 1997), 53; and Henry Allison, Kant's Theory of Taste (Cambridge:

formation of the more complex concepts or ideas through which -- for example -- objects are sorted into higher-level kinds characterized by a multiplicity of features. But this seems to be precluded by Kant's familiar view that intuitions without concepts are "blind," which suggests that intuitions on their own could not give us features of objects, even simple features like colour and shape. And an example from student notes on Kant's logic lectures tells against the compositional picture by suggesting that an activity of comparison is required, not only for the acquisition of higher-level concepts characterized by a multiplicity of features or marks, but also for arriving at the apparently simple concept red.<sup>7</sup>

A second difficulty which arises in connection with the tree example is that even if we assume that we possess the concepts of leaf, branch and trunk, the example gives no indication of why our experience of the three trees should give rise to a concept involving just these features, as opposed to the many other features which those three trees have in common. For example, a spruce, a willow and a linden typically have in common that they lack edible fruit, that they afford a degree of shelter from the rain, that they are composed of woody material, and that insects live in them. So why do we not attend to these features so as to arrive at a concept which would include the particular trees presented to us, but also exclude fruit-trees and include wooden houses? It is hard to suppose any explanation for our privileging the tree-characterizing features other than that we are already in some sense representing the sample objects as trees, so that possession of the concept tree is already assumed from the start. Now it might be objected that this problem derives from the artificiality of the example. In real life we derive the concept of tree from exposure to a much larger sample of trees, and any child who began associating the word "tree" with houses, or

---

Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21ff.

refusing to apply it to apple-trees, would very quickly be corrected. But what is common to the example and to real life is that the number of trees we have to go on is finite. And it is always possible -- using the sorts of manoeuvres typified by Goodman's grue and Kripke's quus -- to come up with any number of features held in common by a finite group of objects, so that any finite sample can be regarded as exemplifying any number of non-standard kinds.

The upshot of this seems to be that we cannot regard the appeal to comparison, reflection and abstraction as constituting Kant's answer to the question of how empirical concepts are possible, but only as explaining how concepts we already possess can be clarified or made explicit.<sup>8</sup> That is, Kant's account is not meant to explain how we come to possess the capacity to represent the objects in question as trees, but rather how we move from our implicit grasp of them as trees to an explicit understanding of the concept tree: that is a grasp of the concept which allows us to specify criteria for a thing's being a tree. Another way of putting the point is to say that the operation of comparison, reflection and abstraction presupposes that our experience of the trees is already the product of synthesis according to empirical schemata. To put the point in terms of Béatrice Longuenesse's useful distinction between two senses of "concept,"<sup>9</sup> it explains how we move from the possession of an empirical concept understood as a schema or rule for synthesis, to possession of an empirical concept understood as a discursive rule for inference. But this means that we need to find another answer to what now emerges as the more fundamental question about concept-acquisition: how are we to account for our possession of the rule or schema which enables us to see the presented object as a tree in the first place?

---

<sup>7</sup> Wiener Logik, 24:904-5

<sup>8</sup> This is Pippin's view (Kant's Theory of Form, 113).

<sup>9</sup> Kant and the Capacity to Judge, 46-47



A suggestive proposal made by Longuenesse and taken up by Henry Allison is that we can understand the schemata as generated by the very same act of comparison by which we move from schemata to discursive concepts. Longuenesse understands the act of comparison as a comparison of schemata, but she says that "to compare schemata... is first of all to generate these schemata" so that "the schemata result from the very acts of universalizing comparison of which they are the object" (116-117).<sup>10</sup> To paraphrase, it is only through our comparison of schemata that the schemata come into being in the first place. This formulation is, on the face of it, paradoxical: how can we compare rules that do not exist prior to the comparison? But it hints at a bold strategy for resolving the difficulty: namely, to understand the rules of synthesis as existing not prior to, but in virtue of, our awareness of our synthesis as rule-governed. In other words, the activity of reflection on our synthesis through which we arrive at the awareness of it as governed by rules, is precisely what is responsible for the rule-governed character of our synthesis in the first place.

As will become clear later, I am very sympathetic towards the general strategy which I take to be suggested by Longuenesse's proposal. But I find it hard to see how the specific proposal itself can be successful. Even if we accept the general point that there can be no rules without awareness of our activity as rule-governed, it is not clear how that awareness can in turn depend on a comparison of the very rules which it supposedly makes possible. In other words, it is hard to see how the activity of comparison which Kant describes in the Logic -- that is, a comparison of perceptually represented objects to see what they have in common -- could take place without antecedent schemata, and hence how it could be responsible for them. For, as we noted, this kind of comparison seems to presuppose awareness of what is

---

<sup>10</sup>Page references to Longuenesse are to Kant and the Capacity to Judge.

presented to us as having the feature corresponding to the concept to be made explicit, and that in turn seems to presuppose a prior synthesis of the manifold according to that concept.

Moreover Longuenesse herself seems to draw back from this strong proposal by suggesting that the rule is in some sense present prior to the act of comparison, although in an attenuated sense. Thus she says that the rule is present in intuition prior to the act of comparison, albeit "unreflected" and "obscure" (118). Although it lacks the "form of universality," which it can have only in so far as we have a clear consciousness of it, it is still, as she puts it "universal in itself" (ibid.). In another context, she describes our apprehension in intuition as "guided" by the rule (49): something that would seem to preclude the possibility of the rule itself being yielded by a comparison of intuitions, since it would appear to demand that we grasp the rule prior to our activity of apprehension. This implies that she is after all committed to the presence of the rule prior to the act of comparison, so that something other than comparison is required for its generation. One account she gives of the origin of this rule appeals to what she calls an "embryonic" form of comparison which exists in sensibility itself (114n.25). Similarly, we engage in what she calls, following Moritz Steckelmacher, a "silent judging," which is governed by, and teleologically oriented towards, conscious acts of judging (122). This suggests that we acquire the schemata not by virtue of the very same logical comparison which yields empirical concepts but a sort of proto-comparison which precedes that full-fledged comparison. More generally it suggests that we can understand the acquisition of empirical schemata as a subconscious process, one conceived on the model of the conscious processes by which we clarify concepts and combine them in judgments. But if there is a subconscious process responsible for the

initial acquisition of empirical concepts, it is hard to see how we could understand it on the model of the conscious comparison and reflection through which concepts are clarified. For that conscious comparison, in contrast to the subconscious comparison supposedly responsible for schemata, depends on our possession of representations that are already intrinsically conceptual. And it is not clear what it would be for the corresponding operations to be carried out on a manifold which is not yet synthesized according to rules and so presents no general features to serve as materials for our comparison.<sup>11</sup>

## II

As many commentators have pointed out, the problem of empirical universality is not unique to Kant. Kant's view that experience presents us only with particulars is derived from the empiricist tradition represented by Locke, Berkeley and Hume, and these philosophers too are faced with the problem of how to explain our representation of general features common to a multiplicity of things. Locke seems to offer an answer to the problem through his account of "abstraction," whereby "the mind makes the particular ideas received from particular beings to become general" (Essay Concerning

---

<sup>11</sup> It might be thought that the question of how empirical schemata are acquired can be answered by appeal to the activity of transcendental imagination in accordance with the categories. Longuenesse herself suggests that this is at least part of the answer: a complete account of how we acquire empirical schemata requires us to consider the "prior activity of associative imagination, under the guidance of productive imagination" (116n29), and it is only once we have recognized the role of the categories as "rules for forming rules" that "we get an answer to the question, How do empirical concepts themselves emerge?" (51n.25). However, as I have argued in "Lawfulness without a Law" (56-57), we cannot make sense of synthesis according to the categories unless we can make sense of it also as governed by empirical schemata, so we cannot appeal to it independently as an answer to the question of how empirical schemata are applied; moreover, even if we could make sense of synthesis according to the categories alone, it would not be sufficient to account for the acquisition of empirical schemata. Longuenesse also takes the "concepts of reflection" discussed in the *Amphiboly* to play a role in empirical concept-formation (122ff.), but for reasons similar to those just mentioned, I do not think that they help to address the problem with which we are concerned.

Human Understanding, II xi 9). Thus, he says, "the same colour being observed to day in Chalk or Snow, which the mind yesterday received from Milk, it considers that appearance alone, makes it a representative of all that kind; and having given it the name Whiteness it by that sound signifies the same quality wheresoever to be imagin'd or met with; and thus Universals... are made" (ibid.). Or, to take the more complex example given in Book III of the Essay, children arrive at the general idea of man by observing "that there are a great many other things in the World, that in some common agreements of Shape, and several other Qualities, resemble their Father and Mother, and those Persons they have been used to... wherein they make nothing new, but only leave out of the complex idea they had of Peter and James, Mary and Jane, that which is peculiar to each, and retain only what is common to them all" (III iii 7). But these examples suggest two problems analogous to those raised by Kant's tree example. First, they both seem to presuppose an antecedent recognition of general features: we have to observe the "same colour" in milk and snow, and we have to recognize "common agreements of shape and other qualities" in respect of which individual human beings resemble one another. Second, even granted that such basic features of colour and shape are given to us, it is not clear how we can arrive at a complex general idea of man unless we already in some sense perceive the individuals presented to us as human beings. For otherwise how could we know which of the many "common agreements" we have observed in them belong to the concept of man, and which do not? So it seems that after all Locke must regard our sensory ideas as presenting us with general qualities and features in spite of their supposedly "particular" character.

The situation is no different with Berkeley, who, in spite of his vigorous polemic against the doctrine of abstract ideas, holds essentially

the same view.<sup>12</sup> In terms reminiscent of Locke, Berkeley says that "an idea which considered in itself is particular becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort" (Principles of Human Knowledge, Introduction, §12). This is possible in so far as we are capable of disregarding certain features of the object presented by that particular idea. For example, if we are carrying out a geometrical demonstration about triangles in general, we draw on an idea of some particular triangle but without invoking in our demonstration such features as the triangle's being right-angled or isosceles. This is possible because a man "may consider a figure merely as triangular, without attending to the particular qualities of the angles or relations of the sides" (ibid., §16). But if this account is understood as addressing the problem of empirical universality it raises the same difficulties we saw with Kant and again with Locke. First, it is not clear how any general features at all can be given to us compatibly with the particularity of sensory ideas. Second, even granted that certain basic sensory features can be given to us, it is still not clear what allows us to privilege some features rather than others as contributing to a higher-level property.

What about Hume? In his discussion of abstract ideas in the Treatise,<sup>13</sup> Hume claims to endorse Berkeley's view, which he characterizes as the view that "all general ideas are nothing but particular ones, annexed to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recall upon occasion other individuals, which are similar to them" (17). The reference to "recalling," however, suggests that Hume is going beyond

---

<sup>12</sup> In claiming that Berkeley's view is close to Locke's, I am following Michael Ayers; see Locke (London: Routledge, 1991), I 250-251). Longuenesse opposes Locke's view on generality to that of Berkeley and Hume, and sees Kant as to some degree returning to a Lockean view (see 119); as will become clear, the view presented here disagrees with hers on both of these points.

<sup>13</sup> A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I, Part I, chapter vii. Page references are to the Selby-Bigge edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Berkeley; and indeed his development of the view shows that this is in fact the case. For the way in which ideas acquire their "more extensive signification" depends on a characteristically Humean mechanism of customary or habitual association. According to Hume's account, a particular idea becomes general in so far as it is attached to a word which in turn is customarily applied to that idea and to others which resemble it. When we hear the word, it not only calls to mind that particular idea but also, as Hume puts it, "revives the custom" by which the word is used to apply to the various resembling ideas. In other words, the hearing of the word puts the mind in a state of readiness by which any one of the class of resembling ideas can be called to mind.<sup>14</sup> Hume draws out the implications of this view in his discussion of the use of ideas in reasoning. When we reason, for example, about the nature of triangles we have in our mind a particular idea of a triangle, for example the idea of an equilateral triangle of a certain size; and we initially draw conclusions about triangles in general based on that particular idea. If, however, we erroneously draw a conclusion that relies on some feature which is not universal to triangles, then an idea contradicting that conclusion will come to mind, leading us to reject it. Thus, if we claim on the basis of our idea that the angles of a triangle are equal to one another, "the other individuals of a scalenum and isosceles, which we overlook'd at first, immediately crowd in upon us, and make us perceive the falsehood of this proposition" (21).<sup>15</sup>

Despite the references to custom which distinguish Hume's view from that of Locke and Berkeley, the view is often thought to suffer from the same problem. Hume begins his account of the formation of general ideas by saying

---

<sup>14</sup> Don Garrett helpfully gives this class a name: the "revival set" (Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 63).

<sup>15</sup>For an illuminating discussion see Janet Broughton, "Explaining General

that "when we have found a resemblance among several objects that often occur to us, we apply the same name to all of them" (20). This seems to imply that the customary use of the name, and the associated disposition for recalling ideas to mind, depend on the antecedent recognition of a resemblance among the relevant ideas. And this in turn seems to assume that we already have a general idea, namely of the respect in which the particular ideas resemble one another. Put in terms of Hume's example, the problem is that we cannot acquire a custom of calling all triangles by the same name, and relatedly a disposition whereby a particular idea of one triangle calls other triangles to mind, unless we already possess the general concept of a triangle.<sup>16</sup> But although Hume's reference to "finding a resemblance" does appear to lay him open to this objection, there is another way of understanding Hume's view on which the problem does not arise. On this interpretation of Hume, the acquisition of the relevant custom does not depend on an antecedent recognition of resemblances among our ideas. Rather, it is a basic psychological fact about us that our associations of ideas follow certain regular patterns, so that, for example, the idea of a particular triangle will naturally call to mind ideas of other triangles in preference, say, to ideas of quadrilaterals or circles or indeed things that are not plane figures at all. It is because of these natural patterns of association that, once the word "triangle" has been applied to a representative sample of triangles, we will become disposed to apply it to triangles generally; and, relatedly, that when we entertain hypotheses involving the word "triangle," it is precisely ideas of triangles that we are disposed to call to mind as

---

Ideas," Hume Studies 26 (2), 2000.

<sup>16</sup>See Norman Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London: Macmillan, 1940), 260. Henry Allison raises this objection and also a related one: how can the idea of an isosceles or scalene triangle, called to mind, be recognized as a counterexample unless we already recognize it as a triangle?

potential counterexamples. "Finding a resemblance" among triangles, on this reading, does not precede the acquisition of the corresponding disposition; rather, acquiring the disposition is just what "finding the resemblance" consists in.<sup>17</sup>

If we understand Hume in this way, then his account of empirical generality is very different from that of Locke and Berkeley, and different in a way which bypasses the problem. Hume's view does not presuppose the representation of empirical generality, but rather accounts for it by exploiting the generality of a custom or disposition. Reverting to the tree example of the previous section, we represent the general concept tree in so far as we entertain an idea of one particular tree accompanied by a state of readiness to call to mind ideas of other particular trees: a state of readiness which is in turn possible because we have acquired a disposition to associate different ideas of trees with the same general term and hence with one another. Such a disposition is general because it is indefinite in scope. The ideas we are disposed to call to mind in connection with our

---

(Kant's Theory of Taste, 23)

<sup>17</sup>The dispositionalist position ascribed to Hume on this interpretation has some affinity to the "psychological nominalism" which, according to Wilfrid Sellars, we arrive at through "modifying" Hume's view (§29 of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in Science, Perception and Reality [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963], 160-161). Broughton allows it as a possible reading, but does not herself endorse it. One commentator who does endorse a dispositionalist reading of I vii is Ayers (see Locke, I, 257), although his account differs from the present view, and from that of most other commentators, in taking Hume's concern in the passage to be, not the problem of empirical generality, but rather the problem of how a priori knowledge is possible. It is not essential to the argument of this paper that the interpretation described here does in fact correspond to Hume's view. However, in spite of the fact that the reading does not fit perfectly with the text of I vii itself, I think there is a case to be made for its adoption on the grounds that it coheres well with Hume's naturalistic outlook overall and, in particular, with his denial that there is any difference in principle between human reason and the reason of animals (see III xvi).



initial particular idea and its associated general term need not be limited to ideas of trees we have actually experienced, still less to ideas of trees that have been expressly associated with the word "tree." But this does not prevent our acquiring the disposition on the basis of exposure to a limited sample of trees. And if acquisition of the general idea or concept can be identified with acquisition of the disposition, then the problems noted in connection with Kant's use of the example can be avoided. On coming to associate the word "tree" with spruces, willows and lindens, most human beings will in fact form a disposition such that the same word will call to mind fruit trees but not wooden houses. And that is just to say -- on the interpretation of Hume I am suggesting -- that they will acquire the general concept "tree."

So understood, however, Hume's account suffers from another kind of problem. We can put the problem by saying that, even though there is generality in the account, it is in the wrong place: it does not enter into the content of our ideas but is, rather, external to them. The account is supposed to explain how a particular idea can become "general in its representation": how it is that in having the idea of a particular tree or triangle, I come to represent the general property of being a tree or a triangle. But why should the representational character of a particular idea be transformed in this way simply by being accompanied by a state of readiness to call to mind other particular ideas? We might try to answer this by saying that it is the awareness of my own state of readiness, rather than the particular idea itself, which constitutes my possession of the general idea. In entertaining the particular idea of a tree or triangle, we might say, I feel myself impelled or driven to call to mind other ideas of trees or triangles, and it is in that feeling that the representation of an object as a tree, or as a triangle, consists. However, this answer is

unsatisfactory, since the representation of a general feature of objects seems to require more than the awareness of a subjective tendency to associate ideas. Perhaps the idea of a willow tree always brings to mind childhood picnics, or the thought of linden trees inevitably reminds of me of Berlin; and perhaps I am well aware of these patterns of association among my ideas. This does not mean that I recognize a feature common to willows and picnics, or to lindens and Berlin. Even if I can explain my tendencies of association in terms of objective relations among the things represented by my ideas (for example, that my family used to have picnics near a willow tree, or that Berlin's most famous avenue is planted with lindens), my awareness of those tendencies does not constitute a grasp of any feature or relation belonging to the objects represented. All that I am aware of is something about my own psychological make-up, and it is not clear how such an awareness could ever amount to the representation of general features belonging to things independently of me.<sup>18</sup>

### III

We have now considered two pre-Kantian, and more specifically empiricist, positions on the question of empirical generality or universality. The first is that of Locke and Berkeley, and it can also be ascribed to Hume, if Hume's view is understood according to what we might

---

<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the account could be modified to accommodate these cases of idiosyncratic association, by supposing that awareness of an associative tendency amounts to the representation of a general feature only if I can rule out the tendency's being due to some particular quirk of my psychology. Thus modified, the account says that I represent something as a tree if I not only call to mind other trees in association with it, but also take myself, in so doing, to manifest a tendency that is part of human nature, in the sense that it is common to all or most human beings. But the question remains: why should that amount to representing a feature or property of things, as opposed to a psychological tendency in myself (albeit one shared by human beings in general)? Even if we rule out idiosyncratic associations, it is hard to see how simply being aware of a tendency to call certain ideas

call an "intentionalist" reading. The second is the position occupied by Hume if we understand him on the alternative, "dispositionalist" reading. On the first position, despite the supposed particularity of our sensory ideas (or in Hume's case, impressions), they present us not only with individual things, but also with general features common to a plurality of things. On the second position, the particularity of ideas remains unimpaired, and the possibility of general ideas is accounted for in terms of the possession of general dispositions to associate particular ideas in determinate ways. But neither of these positions is satisfactory: on the first, the representation of empirical generality is invoked too soon, whereas on the second it fails to make any appearance at all.

Is there any alternative? I think that there is, and I want to characterize it by taking as a starting-point the dispositionalist reading of Hume.<sup>19</sup> Let us go back to the suggestion that we can account for my entertaining the general idea tree by supposing that I have an idea of some particular tree, coupled with a state of readiness to call to mind ideas of other trees. And let us suppose that on some occasion I do have a particular idea of a tree, say, a linden, and that due to my having the relevant disposition, an idea of some other tree, say a sycamore, comes to mind. Now, as we saw, the problem with this suggestion is that, even if we add some kind of awareness of being impelled to think of the sycamore, the most that this account can give us is a recognition of a certain psychological tendency in myself. It does not give us what we want, namely the recognition of something common to the linden and the sycamore. But what if we supplement the suggestion by adding that, when the idea of the sycamore comes to mind, I

---

to mind could amount to the awareness of a general feature which the objects of the ideas have in common.

<sup>19</sup> From now on I shall refer to Hume, taken on this reading, as "Hume" tout court.

take its appearance in my mind to be appropriate? More specifically, what if we say that I take the idea of the sycamore to be the upshot not merely of a certain tendency in myself, but of a tendency which is universally valid in Kant's sense: a tendency which everyone ought to feel when entertaining the idea of a linden? If we amend the suggestion in this way, then we can address the problem by saying that my awareness goes beyond a recognition of actual psychological processes and tendencies in myself. In contrast to the problematic examples of willows and picnics, or lindens and Berlin, I take it not only that I myself have a tendency to associate the idea of the linden and the idea of the sycamore, but also that this association between ideas is appropriate, or conforms to an intersubjectively valid standard governing how these ideas ought to be associated. I take it that these ideas are not merely associated in my own mind, but that they belong together, in the sense that everyone ought to feel the same tendency to associate them as I do. And this makes it much less implausible to suppose that my awareness could amount to a grasp of an objective feature shared by the sycamore and the linden themselves.

Now I want to propose that this amended suggestion represents, at least in part, Kant's solution to the problem of empirical generality or universality. More precisely, I want to see Kant as adopting a Humean view, but with two significant modifications. First, Kant expands the role that Hume had ascribed to the association of ideas, holding that dispositions to associate ideas are required not just for general thought and belief, but also for perception itself. So for Kant it is not just in thinking about trees that we are in a state of readiness to call to mind particular ideas of trees; rather, the very perception of a tree involves the activation of a disposition to call to mind previous representations of trees. Second, and more importantly for the purposes of this paper, Kant gives the Humean view a

normative twist. My perception of a tree not only involves my being in a state of readiness to call to mind -- or in Kant's terms to "reproduce" -- representations of other trees; it also involves my taking it that, in so far as I do call ideas of other trees to mind, I am doing what I and everyone else ought to be doing under the circumstances. The generality of my disposition is thus, so to speak, incorporated into my perception rather than remaining external to it as on the Humean view. I see the tree as a tree in virtue not merely of my state of readiness to call to mind previously perceived trees in connection with it, but also of my awareness that this state of readiness is appropriate given my present perceptual situation.<sup>20</sup>

To see what might lead us to understand Kant in this way, let us go back to the discussion of Kant which we left at the end of section II. We saw in section I that the procedures of comparison, reflection and abstraction described in the Logic do not by themselves explain how the acquisition of empirical concepts is possible. Rather, they presuppose that we already possess empirical concepts in the form of schemata, that is, rules for the imaginative synthesis of the manifold. They explain how we arrive at an explicit understanding of these concepts, one which enables us for example

---

<sup>20</sup>I do not mean to claim here that the two conditions mentioned in this sentence are sufficient for the representation of generality. There are many cases in which someone might associate ideas in a certain way, and take her associations to be appropriate rather than idiosyncratic, without her representing the objects of her ideas as having a common feature: for example when the perception of a tree calls to mind birds, or lumber. What is required further, on the view I am presenting, is that the subject's awareness of the appropriateness of her associations be "primitive," that is, not based on the prior appreciation of some fact about the world which legitimizes the association. In the example given, the subject presumably takes her associations to be appropriate on the grounds that birds live in trees and trees can be made into lumber. But in the kinds of cases which I take Kant to have in mind as accounting for the representation of generality, the subject cannot cite any reason for the appropriateness of her associations. I discuss this "primitive" appreciation of appropriateness in section V, in connection with the question of whether one can take one's associations to be appropriate without antecedently grasping a rule in virtue of which they are appropriate.

to grasp that something counts as a tree if it is the kind of thing that has leaves, branches and a trunk. But they do not explain how we come to be able to see something as a tree in the first place, since that is accounted for in terms of the imagination's activity in accordance with rules. We find Kant's most detailed account of this activity in the section of the first edition Transcendental Deduction entitled the "threefold synthesis." The account of imaginative synthesis which Kant gives in this section is extremely complex, but at its center is an activity which he calls the reproduction of the sensible manifold. This is an activity of recalling previous perceptions, where the recall involved is of two different kinds. In the first, we call to mind the perceptions that immediately preceded a current perception in order to form a coherent image. For example, in order to perceive a line we must "reproduce" the previously perceived segments alongside the currently perceived segment. In the second, we call to mind representations of previously perceived objects of the same kind as the one we are now perceiving. This allows us to represent the object of our current perception as having features which do not impinge on our senses at the time of perception, but which we nonetheless perceive as belonging to the object. For example I can perceive a body as impenetrable even though I do not touch it because in perceiving it visually I also call to mind perceptions of other bodies in which their impenetrability did impinge on my senses. Similarly, I might see a distant tree as having leaves even though I am sufficiently far away that a homogeneous mass of green would make the same sensory impression. What allows me to see it as having leaves, as opposed to being draped with green fabric, is that in seeing it I reproduce previous representations of trees in which the distinctness of the leaves directly affected my sense-organs.

Both these kinds of reproduction clearly have some affinity with the

association of ideas as Hume conceives it. And the second in particular is reminiscent of the kind of association invoked in Hume's account of how particular ideas become general. But the differences may seem too pronounced for it to be possible to assimilate Kant's view to a version of Hume's, even taking into account the two modifications I mentioned earlier. The most important difference has to do with the rule-governed character of reproduction. For Kant, at least as he is standardly understood, our imaginative activity of reproducing representations is not the effect of habit or custom, as the corresponding associations are for Hume, but is carried out in accordance with a previously grasped rule. In other words, imagination is guided in its reproductive syntheses by understanding: and this guidance takes place in virtue of our grasp of concepts, both pure and empirical. This presents a sharp contrast with Hume, for whom associations of ideas are not guided by any intellectual faculty, but are simply a result of blind dispositions, like those of animals.

But we can also read Kant in a way that brings him closer to Hume while still doing justice to the rule-governed character of our reproductive associations. For the claim that our activity of imagination is governed by rules does not necessarily imply that our activity must be guided by those rules. Nor does it imply that the activity cannot be, as on Hume's view, the expression of natural dispositions of the kind that are shared by animals. On the reading that I am proposing, the activity of reproductive synthesis, like the association of ideas for Hume, is simply something that we are naturally disposed to do. It is a natural psychological fact about human beings that, if shown a certain number of trees, they will develop a disposition such that the perception of one tree will tend to call to mind other, previously perceived trees. What makes the corresponding associations rule-governed is not that they are guided by a specific, antecedently grasped

rule, but rather the fact that we take them to have normative significance. The associations are rule-governed because in carrying them out I take myself to be doing not only what I am disposed to do, but also what I (and everyone else) ought to do. That is, I take my actual associations, blindly habitual though they are, to manifest conformity to a normative standard applicable to everyone. The rule-governedness of my associations is thus a function of my taking them to be rule-governed, which is in turn a function of my taking my natural dispositions as exemplifying a universally valid norm.

Part of the appeal of this reading is that it offers an answer to the question that remained unsolved at the end of section I. That was the question of how to account for our possession of the rules governing the synthesis of the manifold, in particular those rules identifiable with -- or at least corresponding to -- empirical concepts. Seeing something as a tree requires that we synthesize the manifold according to a certain rule corresponding to the concept tree. But how could we come to grasp such a rule antecedently to an experience in which we see something as a tree? The difficulty here dissolves if we reject the assumption that the rule must be grasped antecedently to the experience, and more specifically to the synthesis which makes the experience possible. Once this assumption is rejected, we do not need to explain how the rule can be acquired antecedently to the synthesis. Instead, we can say that the rule is acquired in so far as the subject acquires the disposition that makes the relevant kind of synthesis possible. I acquire the rule tree, and hence become capable of seeing things as trees, by acquiring the disposition to associate different representations of trees with one another, and, more specifically, to reproduce past perceptions of trees when a particular tree is presented to



me.<sup>21</sup> But this is possible only because I take a certain attitude towards the disposition, namely that the associations I am disposed to carry out in accordance with the disposition conform to a normative standard which is universally valid. It is only because I regard my actual associations as expressing how I (and everyone else) ought to associate representations, that my coming to be disposed to associate representations in that way amounts to the acquisition of a rule according to which they ought to be associated.

#### IV

In the previous section, I suggested that we view Kant's account of empirical generality as a modification of the dispositionalist view I ascribed to Hume. Grasping an empirical concept involves, as on Hume's account, the possession of a disposition to associate one's representations in certain determinate ways; but it also involves taking one's associations to be as they ought to be, that is to manifest conformity to normative standards. Reading Kant in this way helps us to see how his identification of empirical concepts with rules for synthesis can serve as an answer to the problem of empirical generality. For it suggests that this identification need not require the possession of concepts prior to synthesis, but merely that the subject be capable of regarding her activity of synthesis in normative terms. However, this reading rests on a philosophical presupposition which is likely to strike readers as problematic. My reading

---

<sup>21</sup> This is somewhat oversimplified. For one thing, it applies only in so far as concepts are observational. To the extent that a concept is theoretical, possession of that concept, even in a minimal sense, will require more of a capacity to articulate criteria. Second, depending on the context, we might invoke more or less stringent requirements for concept possession: e.g. we might say that a child has the concepts of solid, liquid, and gas if she can reliably sort things into the appropriate categories, but impose more demanding requirements on a student of advanced chemistry.

is based on the suggestion that we can account for a subject's grasp of a rule in terms of her adopting a normative attitude towards her mental activity. This suggestion presupposes that we can make sense of her as adopting this normative attitude without in turn assuming that she grasps a specific rule to which her mental activity is subject. But it might be protested that this is impossible. How can I take an association of ideas to be appropriate if I don't antecedently have in mind some specific rule with which it accords? For example, how can I take my association of the idea of linden with the idea of a sycamore to be appropriate if I do not already think of the association as governed by the concept tree?

This protest might reflect two different kinds of worry. The first stems from the fact that a single idea, for example the idea of a linden, might be associated on various occasions with ideas of many different kinds of things: ideas of lindens, of other deciduous trees, of other trees more generally, of living things and so on. Given this, it might seem that recalling the idea of a sycamore constitutes an appropriate association only on the assumption that the operative rule is, say, tree or deciduous tree. In another context, say one in which the linden is presented as an example of its particular species, the association with a sycamore would be inappropriate. Generalizing this first worry, it might seem that, depending on how the context is characterized, any arbitrarily specified association might be made out to be either appropriate or inappropriate. For example, if the linden is presented as an example of something which is wooden, harbours insects, and has no leaves in winter, then the association with the idea of a house would seem to be appropriate and the association with the idea of spruce would seem to be inappropriate. So it might seem that the view I am suggesting does not avoid the problem of concept-acquisition noted in section I.

However, this worry, at least in its generalized version, overlooks the crucial role I am ascribing to natural dispositions. The account I am suggesting depends on the idea -- implicit in Hume -- that our capacity to form associative dispositions is limited. As Hume points out in the chapter of the Treatise discussed earlier (Book One, I vii), "the idea of an equilateral triangle of an inch perpendicular may serve us in talking of a figure, of a rectilinear figure, of a triangle, and of an equilateral triangle" (20). This is possible because each of the corresponding terms corresponds to a specific disposition: "all these terms," he says, "excite their particular habits" (ibid). But it seems clear that the list could not be expanded indefinitely, since there is a limited number of habits that we are naturally inclined to form in connection with the idea Hume describes. Even though the equilateral triangle Hume describes is an instance of the concept equilateral or five-sided, that disjunctive concept does not correspond to a natural disposition: we do not without special training form the habit of associating equilateral triangles with, say, irregular pentagons and regular hexagons to the exclusion of oblongs and isosceles triangles. Given this kind of limitation, there is no reason why we cannot say of each of this finite set of habits or dispositions, that the corresponding associations are appropriate. It is true that if someone misidentifies a linden as a sycamore because her disposition to associate ideas of various kinds of trees leads her to call to mind the idea of a sycamore when presented with a linden, she is doing something inappropriate, namely making a false claim. But that does not show that the association itself cannot be regarded as appropriate. For the association is just a particular manifestation of the disposition in virtue of which she sees the linden as a tree: and the actualization of that disposition is appropriate no matter what

the context.<sup>22</sup>

There is, however, a second and more abstract worry that might be raised about the presupposition under discussion, namely that it is incoherent. It might be claimed that it simply does not make sense to suppose that we can think of a thing as conforming to a normative standard, without first having in mind the idea of a specific rule or standard to which it is antecedently subject. In the present context, the claim would be that the very idea that my mental activity is as it ought to be, presupposes the antecedent idea of a rule or concept which dictates how it ought to be. But it is not obvious why this should be so. It seems to me that we do in fact often take our associations to be appropriate without being able to recognize specific respects in virtue of which they are appropriate. Indeed, the possibility of this kind of normative awareness is routinely assumed in introducing children to new concepts. Six-year-olds learn the concepts of solid, liquid, and gas, say, by being presented with objects which they are asked to sort into kinds: does the chalk "belong with" the stone, the bottle of water, or the balloon? This kind of procedure relies not just on the child's being mechanically disposed to sort objects in a particular way, but on a primitive appreciation that what she is doing is appropriate: she recognizes that the chalk should go with the stone even if she cannot say anything about why it should. What is going on here is not that the child already grasps that the chalk and the stone are solid as opposed to liquid or gaseous, and therefore should be classed together: rather, the child is

---

<sup>22</sup> It might be objected that the idea of a natural disposition is itself problematic, or at least cannot bear the weight which is being placed on it in this account. I will not try to address this line of objection here, except to say that my appeal to natural dispositions in the context of this account derives some support from Graeme Forbes's defence of a dispositionalist account of rule-following in "Skepticism and Semantic Knowledge" (originally published 1984, reprinted in Alexander Miller and Crispin Wright, eds., Rule-Following and Meaning [Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2002]).

inclined to sort the chalk and the stone together, and implicitly, takes her inclination to reflect how they ought to be sorted. Her appreciation of the appropriateness of her sorting inclinations -- that is to say, of her associative dispositions -- does not presuppose possession of the concept solid, but it provides the basis on which that concept can be acquired. To the extent that her sorting inclinations in fact lead her to discriminate solids from liquids and gases, her recognition of their appropriateness amounts to a recognition of her activity as both governed by, and conforming to, a rule: a rule which she can initially specify only by the example of her own activity, but which she will later be in a position to articulate as the concept solid.

One might be puzzled here about how a subject can take her activity to be governed by a rule which is, in the first instance, picked out through the example of that very activity. In order for her to take her activity to be governed by a rule, she must be able to make sense of the possibility that what she does might fail to accord with the rule; but how can what she does fail to accord with a rule which is exemplified by her activity itself?<sup>23</sup> An initial answer is that, while she cannot take what she does at any given time both to exemplify a rule and to fail to accord with that same rule, she can still make sense of the idea of the rule's being contravened, namely by considering the possibility that she might act differently. For she may take it that, if she were to act differently, she would fail to accord with the rule which she now recognizes as governing her activity. She would, as she sees it, be acting wrongly because she would not be acting this way. By the same token, she may take others to be failing to accord with the rule now

---

<sup>23</sup> This objection has been put to me in terms of Wittgenstein's remark about a "private language" at Philosophical Investigations §258: "One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that just means that here we can't talk about 'right.'"

exemplified by her behaviour, and she may take herself to have contravened that rule on previous occasions. That is to say, she may take others, and herself on other occasions, to be failing to do as they ought because they are failing to do as she is doing now.

This answer might seem inadequate to address the difficulty. For surely, it might be objected, the subject must recognize that, if she were to act differently, she would still be according with a rule exemplified by what she would be doing in that counterfactual situation. Similarly, she must recognize that others who act differently are according with rules that are exemplified by what they are doing. So it would seem that she is not in a position to make sense of anyone's ever failing to act as they ought: no matter what others do, she must take them to be doing as they ought in the sense that they are according with a rule exemplified by their own activity. And that undermines the idea that her own activity exemplifies a rule which is universally valid.

But the assumption underlying this objection is mistaken. If a subject takes what she herself does in a certain situation to conform to a rule which it exemplifies, she will not recognize another subject's divergent activity as also conforming to a rule which it exemplifies; rather, she will deny that the other subject's activity exemplifies a rule at all. If, in the context of the kind of sorting exercise I described earlier, Alma sorts the chalk with the stone, but sees another child, Bruno, sorting it with the balloon, she will not take it that his behaviour is governed by a rule which it exemplifies, because she does not take there to be any rule which prescribes that the chalk ought to be sorted with the balloon. In taking it that she is sorting the objects as they ought to be sorted, and thus as anyone ought to sort them, she excludes the possibility that someone presented with the same objects, but who sorts them differently, is also doing as he ought. She will

thus take Bruno to be failing to do as he ought, either in the sense that there is no "ought" applicable to his behaviour at all (she may think that he has opted out of the exercise and is engaged in random play), or in the sense that he has violated the rule which does govern his behaviour, namely the rule exemplified by her own sorting activity. Whether or not she takes his activity to be rule-governed at all, it does not, by her lights, exemplify a rule.

It might seem problematic here that Alma has no criterion for determining that it is Bruno rather than herself who is mistaken in taking his activity to exemplify a rule, and hence Bruno rather than herself who must be counted as failing to do as he or she ought. For it is equally open to Bruno to take what he does to exemplify a rule for sorting the objects in question, and hence to deny that Alma's sorting activity exemplifies a rule. We seem to be faced with the possibility of multiple subjects sorting objects or associating representations in different ways, each taking her own activity to exemplify a rule, and none in a position to establish the legitimacy of her claim against those of the others. So how can any one subject, recognizing that possibility, take her own sorting or associative activity to be as it ought to be? Lacking a criterion, she seems to be in no position to defend her claim in the face of disagreement from others, and that seems to undermine the intelligibility of her claim to be doing as she ought in the first place.

One part of my response here is simply to deny that the absence of a criterion of correctness undermines the possibility of a subject's intelligibly taking herself to be doing as she ought. Two subjects can genuinely disagree about what is appropriate in a given case -- and hence make conflicting claims about which one is mistaken in taking his or her activity to exemplify a rule -- without there being a criterion available to

resolve that disagreement. But the other part of the response is to draw attention once again to the role played in my account by the idea of natural dispositions, and in particular, the idea of such dispositions as shared. For the most part, human beings naturally converge in the ways they are inclined to sort objects, and, correspondingly, to associate representations: if they did not, we could never come to attach a common meaning to words like "tree" and "solid." So disagreements like that between Alma and Bruno rarely arise, and, if they do, they tend to be quickly resolved. With further exposure to examples, and other kinds of training, Bruno's sorting dispositions will naturally come into line with Alma's and ours, so that he comes to agree with Alma that his earlier sorting behaviour failed to be as it ought to be. The point here is not that a subject can use the idea of "what comes naturally" as a criterion for determining whether or not she is associating her representations as she ought. Rather, it is that we all naturally tend to associate our representations in the same ways, so that the need for such a criterion does not arise. The fact of our shared natural dispositions enables us to agree on which rules are exemplified by our activity overall, and hence on a shared set of concepts.

I have been defending the possibility of a subject's adopting a normative attitude to her mental activity without any antecedent grasp of a concept or rule determining how that activity ought to be. But could Kant allow such a possibility? The answer is that he not only could, but does; and this brings us back to the central thesis of the paper. For his account of judgments of beauty in the Critique of Judgment explicitly relies on the idea that we can conceive of our mental activity to be as it ought to be without conceiving it as governed by a specific rule or concept.<sup>24</sup> As I noted

---

<sup>24</sup> For a fuller discussion of this point, see "Lawfulness without a Law," especially section IV, and "Kant on Aesthetic and Biological Purposiveness" (in Reclaiming the History of Ethics, edited by Andrews Reath, Barbara Herman



at the beginning of the paper, a judgment of beauty makes a claim to universal validity. In taking something to be beautiful, I take it that everyone ought to judge it in the same way that I do. But judgments of beauty have a further feature that at first sight seems to stand in conflict with their universal validity. They are what Kant calls "subjectively grounded": instead of ascribing an objective feature to the thing, as a cognitive judgment would do, they reflect the subject's own response to the object, a response which consists, more specifically, in a certain activity of the subject's imagination. So in making a judgment of beauty, I take it that everyone ought to respond imaginatively to the object as I do. But I do so without ascribing to the object a feature in virtue of which that response is universally called for, and hence without taking the appropriateness of my imaginative activity to depend on its conformity to an antecedently specified rule. A subject who judges an object to be beautiful thus takes her mental activity to be appropriate in the primitive way which I have described: in Kant's words, she sees her judgment as "the example of a universal rule which cannot be stated [die man nicht angeben kann]" (Critique of Judgment §18, 237).

Now while I do not have space to go into the many complications of Kant's account of judgments of beauty, I want at least to note that Kant's treatment of them indicates his acceptance of the kind of normative attitude under consideration. For Kant holds that such judgments are both intelligible and in principle legitimate. The mere fact that we make judgments of beauty shows that we do, under certain circumstances, take ourselves to respond appropriately to objects, but without taking ourselves to conform, in so responding, to a specific rule or standard governing the

---

and Christine Korsgaard [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997]), especially section V. In those articles I make a distinction between

perception of the object. Moreover, he argues, we are entitled to so. As long as my pleasure in an object is disinterested, which he takes as implying that it does not depend on any "private condition" which sets me apart from other human beings (Critique of Judgment §6, 5:211), we are entitled to claim that all other human beings ought to respond to the object in the same way that we do. I take this to suggest, in the first place, that Kant himself wants to make room for the possibility of normative claims that do not presuppose specific rules. In the second place, albeit more speculatively, I take it to point to precisely the kind of move embodied in what I have called Kant's "normative twist" on Hume. For our entitlement to make judgments of beauty appears to depend on our being entitled to take a normative attitude towards our mental activity more generally. As long as my mental activity is not influenced by any factors which set me apart from other human beings, Kant appears to suggest, then I can legitimately take it as representing a standard which all human beings, myself included, ought to meet. And if that is so, then to the extent that my dispositions to associate representations are independent of my desires and of other contingent features of my psychology, I can take them as exemplifying normative rules that apply to all human beings.<sup>25</sup>

---

"primitive" and "derivative" ascriptions of normativity which is intended to address worries of the kind discussed above.

<sup>25</sup>This talk of "entitlement" may suggest a further, and still more general, worry about the view I am ascribing to Kant. Suppose I am right to interpret Kant as holding that we regard our mental activity as exemplifying normative rules and that this accounts for the possibility of grasping empirical concepts. This does not in itself seem to show that we are entitled to take this normative attitude towards our mental activity. We are thus left with the question of how we can legitimately take our mental activity to exemplify normative rules, regardless of whether or not we actually do so as a matter of psychological fact. But this question can be answered, I think, by appeal precisely to the dependence of our grasp of empirical concepts on our adoption of this normative attitude. In other words, we are entitled to regard our mental activity as exemplifying normative rules precisely in virtue of the fact that our doing so is a condition of the possibility of empirical concepts, and hence of cognition more generally. I find at least a hint of this answer at §21 of the Critique of Judgment where Kant says that

We are now in a position to see the connection between the two senses of "universal" invoked at the beginning of this paper. When Kant characterizes judgment as the "capacity to think the particular as contained under the universal" he means to refer, at least in part, to the capacity to think particular objects under empirical concepts. But if the view I have attributed to him is correct, he takes this capacity to require that we be able to think the particular under the universal in another sense, namely that of being able to regard certain of our psychological responses to objects as universally valid. This suggests that the most fundamental characterization of judgment should not be as a capacity to think objects under concepts, as suggested by the first sense of "universal," but as a capacity to regard one's mental responses to objects in normative terms, as suggested by the second sense. For it is only by virtue of taking a normative attitude to one's mental activity that one can regard it as governed by rules, which in turn is required for recognizing the objects we perceive as falling under empirical concepts.<sup>26</sup>

---

cognitions and judgments "must... allow of being universally communicated... for otherwise they would be altogether a merely subjective play of the powers of representation, just as skepticism demands" (5:238) and that the "universal communicability of our cognition must be assumed in every logic and every principle of cognition that is not skeptical (5:239). The point can be made vivid by asking what it would be for this normative attitude to fail to be legitimate. In the case of specific concepts whose legitimacy might be called into question, in particular the pure concepts of the understanding, we can make sense of the idea that we are not entitled to use them: experience might fail to present us with objects to which they apply. It is the task of the Transcendental Deduction in the Critique of Pure Reason to rule out that possibility. But the general principle that we are entitled to take a normative attitude towards our mental activity does not purport to be an objective principle, so that it does not make sense to suppose that objects could fail to accord with it. Any attempt to show that it is not legitimate would itself have to appeal to a normative principle governing our mental activity, and would thus be self-defeating. The point here is related to Kant's claim that the deduction of taste (which, as I understand it, rests on the general principle under discussion) is "easy, because it does not have to justify any objective reality of a concept" (Critique of Judgment §38, 5:290).

<sup>26</sup>Earlier versions of this paper were given at the 2002 France-Berkeley Conference on Kant and Normativity, and at the University of Chicago. I am

---

grateful to members of the audiences on those occasions for comments and discussion, and in particular to Janet Broughton, James Conant, John Haugeland, John MacFarlane and Charles Travis. The paper benefitted also from discussions with Janet Broughton, Quassim Cassam, Alva Noë, Seana Shiffrin, and Jay Wallace, and from Rebecca Kukla's valuable substantive and editorial comments.