

Can we make sense of free harmony?

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1. Introduction

The notion of the free harmony of the imagination and the understanding is central to Kant's account of the judgment of taste. Despite its centrality to Kant's project, however, it is remarkably hard to grasp.¹ Free harmony is a state in which imagination *in its free play* agrees with the lawfulness of the understanding. Kant claims, for instance, that “the aesthetic power of judgment in judging the beautiful relates the imagination *in its free play* to the understanding, in order to agree with its concepts in general (without determination of them)” (*KU*, AA 05: 256, my emphasis) and that judgments of taste “must rest on a mere sensation of the reciprocally animating imagination *in its freedom* and the understanding with its *lawfulness*” (*KU*, AA 05: 287, my emphasis).² The trouble is to explain what this relation amounts to. In what follows I argue that the difficulty in accounting for free harmony springs from the fact that this notion has to satisfy two *desiderata*: (a) that free harmony is compatible with a determinate cognition of the beautiful object and thus with the application of a determinate empirical concept to it and that (b) what empirical concept the object is subsumed under is irrelevant to determine whether or not it elicits free harmony. As I will briefly show in section 2, Guyer's well known argument against what he calls the precognitive and the multicognitive interpretations of free harmony (Guyer, 2006, p.165) draw attention to the fact that these interpretations do not account for (a). On the other hand, Guyer's own

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¹This is made evident by the sheer amount of different interpretations of free harmony available in the literature. See, for instance, Ginsborg (1997), Allison (2001), Rush (2001), Guyer (2006), Rueger (2008), Crowther (2010) and Küplen (2015).

²Quotations from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (*KU*) are from Paul Guyer's translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Quotations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*KrV*) are from Paul Guyer's and Allen Wood's translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). References to the First Introduction (*Erste Einleitung*) to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* are abbreviated "EE" and include the section number and the page number according to the pagination of volume 20 of the *Akademie* edition.

metacognitive interpretation faces insurmountable problems in virtue of failing to account for (b). The same difficulty plagues other metacognitive interpretations, such as the one defended by Küplen (2015). I discuss Guyer's interpretation in section 3 and Küplen's in section 4. In light of the problem faced by metacognitive interpretations, it may seem that these desiderata are incompatible: when we apply an empirical concept to an object, imagination is to some extent restrained by the concept; given (a), if the free play of imagination is to be possible, then the concept must leave some room for the imagination's free activity; but concepts can be more or less restrictive and then the extent to which imagination is free, and thus the possibility of free harmony, will depend on the concept applied – contrary to (b).

Further difficulties are added when we consider a couple of claims Kant makes in the *General remark on the first section of the Analytic*. In this section, Kant claims, unsurprisingly, that when it comes to a beautiful object taste fastens on what imaginations apprehends. But he also claims that when apprehending an object imagination is bound to its form and “to this extent has no free play”. These claims imply that the free harmony is not a state of mind in which we can find ourselves while apprehending a beautiful object. Kant quickly dismisses this concern as unproblematic on the grounds that we can, nevertheless, find objects with a form that presents exactly the composition of the manifold imagination *would* design, in accordance with the understanding, *if* left free by itself (*KU*, AA 05: 240-1). With these claims in view I will suggest that what distinguishes a beautiful object is not so much the fact that when perceiving it imagination and understanding engage in free harmony, but that its form correspond to a form imagination *would* freely create in accordance with understanding. This leads to an interpretation of free harmony according to which it is not a state of mind that actually takes place in the contemplation of beauty but rather a state that is emulated by our cognitive faculties when we apprehend a beautiful object. This interpretation can make (a) and (b) compatible as well as account for the connection between the pleasure of taste and the principle of the power of judgment which Kant calls the “Principle of Purposiveness”. This will be the object of section 5.

2. Beauty and Cognition

If we want to make sense of the notion of free harmony, a reasonable place to start our investigation is Kant's account of the roles of imagination and understanding in cognition. For Kant, cognition requires both intuition and concepts (*KrV*, A74/B50). The cognitive roles of imagination and understanding are correlated, respectively, to intuitions and concepts. While imagination is

required “for the intuition and the composition of the manifold of intuition”, the understanding is required “for the concept as representation of the unity of this composition” (KU, AA 05: 287). The function of imagination is not only to passively apprehend but to actively compose, put together in a certain way, the manifold of intuition. The claim that the concept represents the unity of the composition of the manifold alludes to the idea that concepts are rules for the composition of the manifold by the imagination. This is confirmed by the claim that “in the use of the imagination for cognition, the imagination is under the constraint of the understanding and is subject to the limitation of being adequate to its concept” (KU, AA 05: 316-7). Since in free harmony imagination is to be taken in its freedom and, thus, presumably not constrained by the understanding, a natural way to comprehend free harmony is this: in free harmony imagination engages in its typical cognitive function of composing the manifold in a way that somehow agrees with understanding yet without being guided by any determinate concept.

Several different accounts of free harmony agree with this general characterization. Guyer, in his *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, argued that Free Harmony is a state in which imagination's cognitive goal of providing a unified composition of the manifold of intuition is felt to be achieved without the subsumption of the manifold under a determinate concept (Guyer, 1997, p.74-5). According to Guyer, “the harmony of the faculties is then a state in which, somehow, a manifold of intuition is run through and held together as a unity by the imagination without the use of a concept” (Guyer, 1997, p.76). In a similar fashion, Ginsborg claims that “The free play of the faculties does not take place in every or, indeed, in any act of cognition. [...] in aesthetic experience [...] I take my imaginative activity to be as it ought to be *without having in mind any determinate rule to which it conform*” (Ginsborg, 1997, p.74). Given that what provides rules for the activity of imagination are concepts, what Ginsborg is claiming is that free harmony occurs when we take our imaginative activity to harmonize with the demands of understanding without having in mind any determinate concept to which this activity objectively conforms. Finally, Allison claims that when the harmony of the faculties is based on a determinate concept, as in ordinary cognition, it “leaves no scope for the free activity of imagination” (Allison, 2001, p.117) and characterizes free harmony as the state in which imagination and understanding “each proceed on their own paths, without the customary interference or friction between them” (Allison, 2001, p.171), thus, in which imagination engages in its typical activity without being constrained by a determinate concept.

There are important differences between these accounts of free harmony³ but all of them claim that free harmony is incompatible with the application of a determinate concept to (and, therefore, with a determinate cognition of) the object we contemplate. Their common feature is the idea that when understanding applies a concept to the object, imagination can no longer agree with understanding without being subjected to the “limitation of being adequate to its concept” (without complying with a determinate rule of which we are aware in the form of a concept) - and then there is no room for imagination's free activity. This interpretation is strongly suggested by a number of passages, such as Kant's claim that the freedom of the imagination consist in the fact that it “schematizes without a concept” (*KU*, AA 05: 287) and that “when the imagination is compelled to proceed in accordance with a determinate law [...] [then] the satisfaction is not that in the beautiful, but in the good (of perfection, in any case merely the formal kind), and the judgment is not a judgment by means of taste” (*KU*, AA 05: 241).

Guyer, in more recent papers, offered a very strong objection against this interpretation. According to him, Kant is committed to the idea that “we cannot be conscious of an object at all without applying some determinate concept to it” (Guyer, 2006, p.180). His argument is roughly this: according to Kant, one cannot be conscious of an object without applying some pure concepts of understanding to it (the categories); these concepts, however, are nothing but the form of determinate empirical concepts, in such a way that their application requires the application of empirical determinate concepts; it is, therefore, impossible to be conscious of an object, without applying some empirical concept to it. If free harmony prevented the application of determinate concepts to the manifold, we couldn't be conscious of the beautiful object at all.

Even if this objection could be avoided (and for our purposes we may admit that it can)⁴, a related and quite strong objection would still stand. Judgments of taste are always about a particular object and we usually know what the object is (a flower, a bird, a crustacean – to stick to examples Kant himself uses)⁵. We cannot know that an object is a flower without judging it to be a flower and we cannot

³ In particular, Ginsborg's position and Guyer's former position qualify as *precognitive* interpretations of free harmony in Guyer's taxonomy, while Allison's is similar to a *multicognitive* interpretation (Guyer, 2006, p.165-6). According to precognitive interpretations, in cases of free harmony imagination is not compelled to proceed in accordance with any determinate concept. According to multicognitive interpretations, in free harmony imagination is not compelled to proceed according to a determinate rule not because no concept is applied to the object of contemplation but because a number of conceptual possibilities is considered and understanding does not settle for a particular one. Rush (2001, p.58) and Crowther (2010, p. 82) also defend a multicognitive interpretation.

⁴ Assessing Guyer's argument would get us far from the topic of this paper and into the debate about the argument of the Transcendental Deduction. Here it is enough to point out that it is far from uncontroversial. See, for instance, Allais (2015, chapter 11) for a reading of the Transcendental Deduction that allows for the possibility that we may be conscious of “perceptual particulars” through intuition without applying any concept.

⁵ See *KU* AA 05: 229 and AA 05: 281-2.

judge it to be a flower without applying the concept 'flower' to it. Even if it was possible to find something beautiful without having any idea what it is (contrary to Guyer's argument), it is clear that that is not the case with most beautiful objects (as Kant's own examples confirm). As Guyer puts it, judgments of taste usually have the form "This *F* is beautiful" where "*F*" stands for a determinate empirical concept (Guyer, 2006, p.179).

If we assume that free harmony is incompatible with the application of a determinate concept to the object we contemplate, it becomes quite hard to account for all these perfectly ordinary cases in which we judge an object beautiful and derive pleasure from it while, *at the same time*, subsuming it under a concept. In these cases we are aware, in the form of a concept, of a determinate rule to which imagination must conform; imagination will agree with understanding only if its activity conforms to this rule; if this means that in such cases there cannot be an agreement between understanding and imagination *in its freedom*, then most of the judgments we ordinarily take to be judgments of taste will turn out not to be genuine judgments of beauty (which must be grounded on free harmony).

3. Guyer's Metacognitive Interpretation

With these objections in mind Guyer argues that we should adopt a *metacognitive interpretation*. According to this interpretation, when we perceive a beautiful object the manifold of intuition composed by the imagination is recognized to satisfy the rules dictated by the concept we apply to the object. What is distinctive of the state of mind of free harmony is that in it "[...] it is felt that – or as if – the understanding's underlying objective or interest in unity is being satisfied in a way that goes beyond anything required for or dictated by satisfaction of the determinate concept" (Guyer, 2006, p.183). A beautiful object is recognized as an object of a determinate kind, but our experience of it has more unity or coherence than what is required for it to fall under that concept.

How can we understand the idea of a degree of unity in our experience of an object? Recall that for Kant, a concept can be thought of as a representation of the unity of the composition of the manifold (KU, AA 05: 287). We may think of the degree of unity in our experience as relative to the concept in which we recognize the object. For instance, a three-legged dog would present less unity than a dog with four legs because it does not fit so well with the concept of 'dog'. A dog which presented all the traits associated with this concept (such as having a snout, four

legs, a tail, a wet nose, pointy teeth, a furry body – all of these in a particular proportion and arranged in a particular form) would present a high degree of unity.⁶

If this is what Guyer has in mind when he speaks of the degree of unity in our experience, then his account fails. An object with a high degree of unity in this sense is an object that agrees perfectly with the concept applied to it. But Kant clearly states that the agreement of the manifold of an object with its concept makes the object qualitatively perfect, not beautiful (*KU*, AA 05: 227).⁷ Guyer could perhaps claim that the unity which a beautiful object presents is one that goes beyond the objective correspondence between the manifold and the concept of the object – after all it is supposed to be a unity that goes beyond the unity required for the satisfaction of the determinate concept and can only be felt, not objectively ascertained. But if that was the case, every beautiful object would have to be deemed perfect as well, because it cannot have the high degree of unity required for beauty, that goes beyond the agreement of the manifold with the concept, without achieving the agreement of the manifold with the concept that amounts to qualitative perfection. To conceive of something as beautiful would be impossible without conceiving of it as perfect but “by beauty [...] there is not conceived any perfection of the object” (*KU*, AA 05: 228).

Suppose, however, that we could make sense of the idea of a degree of unity in such a way as to distinguish between beauty and perfection – even then Guyer's interpretation would face serious challenges. His interpretation has trouble accounting for pure judgments of ugliness. This is not a problem for Guyer, since he claims that, for Kant, judgments of ugliness are always impure (Guyer, 2004, p.11).⁸ But it is worth considering one way in which Guyer could try to accommodate pure judgments of ugliness and the reasons why this attempt would fail because those reasons point to a serious problem in his account of pure judgments of beauty as well.

Presumably, if a beautiful object is one that presents a unity that goes beyond what is required for the satisfaction of the concept in which we recognize it, an object would fail to be beautiful if it presented just the degree of unity necessary for it to be identified as an instance of a certain concept (no more no less). But that is not the same as being ugly. Given Guyer's formulation of the metacognitive interpretation, it is natural to suppose that ugly objects would be those whose unity falls short of what is required for the satisfaction of a

⁶ For an explanation of the notion of a degree of harmony of the cognitive faculties along these lines see Allison (2001, p.48).

⁷ For a discussion of this problem see Küplen (2015, p.54-5).

⁸ There is an ongoing debate among commentators about the possibility of making room for ugliness in Kant's theory of taste. David Shier (1998) has argued that Kant's account of judgments of taste renders judgments of ugliness impossible. Miles Rind (2002, p.9-10) agrees with Guyer in claiming that Kant's theory leaves room only for impure judgments of taste. For a discussion of Guyer's claim that judgments of ugliness are always impure, see James Phillips (2011). For a comprehensive overview of the debate see Küplen (2015).

determinate concept. But that makes no sense. By this account, an ugly dog is a dog whose unity falls short of what is required for us to recognize it as a dog – and that is just contradictory. One could try to open space for ugliness in this interpretation by claiming that when an object presents only the bare minimum of unity necessary for subsuming it under a determinate concept it is ugly, not just non-beautiful. There would be a *continuum* ranging from the bare minimum of unity necessary for recognition in a concept (ugly), through a reasonable degree of unity (neither beautiful nor ugly) to a very high degree of unity (beautiful). A problem for this approach (and this is a problem for an interpretation as Guyer's in general) is that it makes aesthetic value depend on the concept in which we recognize the object. If a concept is the representation of the unity of the composition of the manifold, then different concepts represent that unity differently and the same manifold may present a high degree of unity with respect to one concept and fall short of it with respect to another.

Consider this case: Peter has never seen nor heard about an anglerfish and, therefore, he has no concept of 'anglerfish'; one fine day he somehow comes across a specimen of anglerfish; he can see it is a fish but it looks very strange: it has an antenna, extremely long and pointy teeth that do not fit in its mouth, a dark gray skin, its side fins seem to be out of place; since he has been hearing a lot of stories about how big companies dump radioactive waste in the sea he figures that is a fish that got deformed due to exposure to radioactivity; at any rate, he finds it very ugly. The interpretation we are considering can explain this last judgment: he finds it ugly because it has the bare minimum of unity required for the satisfaction of the concept of 'fish' – it has gills and fins, but there are a lot of extra features that do not seem to fit together. But now suppose that Anna, who has the concept of 'anglerfish', comes across the same specimen: she recognizes it as an anglerfish and indeed as a very good example of an anglerfish – it has all the right features in all the right places. It is false to say that this specimen *barely* satisfies the concept of 'anglerfish', it actually fits rather smoothly with it. This means that Anna should not find it ugly and that Peter should cease to find it ugly once he acquires the concept of 'anglerfish'. But this is hardly the case: people who know very well what an anglerfish is still find it ugly. Suppose, however, that was the case – even admitting that we would come to a deeper problem. Judgments of taste lay claim to universal validity, but if these judgments are based on the unity the manifold presents in relation to the concept we recognize the object in, then Peter would be justified in judging the anglerfish ugly and Anna would be justified in judging it not-ugly. The only way to restore the universality of judgments of taste in this scenario would be to establish that the anglerfish should be seen according to some concept in particular (since it is in fact an anglerfish, it is natural to suppose that the proper way to see it is as an anglerfish). But then, deciding if the object is ugly or not would require that we settle the question of what it is or what it is supposed to be,

and Kant is clear in claiming that judgments of taste do not depend on the answer to this question (even if, as Guyer claims, they cannot be made before we provide *some* answer to it): the state of mind in the free play of the imagination and the understanding occurs “without presupposing a determinate concept” (*KU*, AA 05: 217-8).

This is a serious problem and Guyer cannot escape it simply by refusing to acknowledge pure judgments of ugliness, for analogous considerations show that Guyer's interpretation has trouble accounting for the idea that judgments of beauty lay claim to universal validity *without presupposing any concept*.

According to Guyer, the felt harmony of the faculties is “a feeling that [the manifold] is unified in a way that goes beyond the unity that is dictated by whatever determinate concept the object is subsumed under – an excess of felt unity or harmony” (Guyer, 2004, p.9). Suppose you see a hummingbird and find it beautiful; it has the usual features you would expect on a hummingbird – the long beak, the small body, delicate wings that flap really fast (all of these combined in the right way so that this particular bird presents the necessary unity to be recognized as a hummingbird); but it has other features that are not necessary for it to fall under the concept 'hummingbird' - green back and breast, a purplish crown, blue-green chin, whitish ear stripe, and a red bill; you feel all of these fit together; there is, therefore, a reasonably clear sense in which this particular manifold presents a degree of unity that goes beyond what is dictated by the concept the object is subsumed under – it is very complex but yet all its features somehow hang together. But now suppose you were accompanied by an ornithologist who saw the hummingbird as well. The ornithologist has at her disposal concepts that are much more fine-grained than your concept of 'hummingbird'. She actually can tell that the bird you are seeing is a male white-eared hummingbird. And, actually, it is not a very good example of a male white-eared hummingbird – the green of its back and breast is not quite the emerald green you would expect and the characteristic black tip in its bill is barely noticeable. It is unified enough for you to recognize its species, but it is not unified in a way that goes beyond what is dictated by the satisfaction of the concept of 'male white-eared hummingbird'. According to Guyer's interpretation, the ornithologist should not find this particular bird beautiful. But judgments of taste lay claim to universal validity. Since you find the bird beautiful, you would demand the agreement of the ornithologist. The trouble here is that free harmony is being conceived as a matter of unity, and unity is being conceived as relative to the concept under which the object appraised is subsumed. As with the case of ugliness, the only way to restore the universality of judgments of taste would be to establish that the beautiful object has to be perceived under some particular concept. But then, deciding whether it is beautiful or not would require that we settle the question of what it is or what it is supposed to be.

Kant clearly indicates, however, that settling conceptual questions about the object is not necessary in order to appreciate its beauty: “the satisfaction in beauty, however, is one that presupposes no concept, but is immediately combined with the representation through which the object is given (not through which it is thought)” (KU, §16, 5: 230). Actually, Kant suggests that concepts may play a role in a particular kind of judgment of beauty – that which he calls “adherent or conditioned beauty” (KU, §16, 5: 229). Adherent beauties, in contrast with free beauty (which pertains to such things as the shells of marine crustaceans or hummingbirds), “presuppose a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection” (KU, §16, 5: 230). For that reason judgments of adherent beauty do not qualify as pure judgments of taste. The idea of judgments of adherent beauty introduces its own set of interpretative difficulties regarding Kant's position, but at least this should be clear: if judgments of free beauty presupposed that the object should be viewed according to a concept in particular (which supplies the rule for the combination of the manifold and, therefore, a concept of its qualitative perfection), then a sharp distinction between free and adherent beauty would be impossible.

4. The Extra-Feature Metacognitive Interpretation

Guyer's metacognitive interpretation does not provide us with an adequate account of free harmony. We should not think, however, that the problems we just considered derive from the particular form Guyer gives to this interpretation. The interpretations Guyer objected to conceived of imagination as completely free in the composition of the manifold presented by a beautiful object. The metacognitive interpretation was motivated by the claim that imagination cannot be completely free in the free harmony – we always (or at least very often) subsume the beautiful object under a concept that provides a rule for the composition of the manifold. What is characteristic of the metacognitive interpretation is the idea that imagination's freedom manifest itself in an activity that somehow sits on top of the activity constrained by the concept. This image itself is problematic. We can see that by considering another way of cashing out the metacognitive interpretation.

Mojca Küplen puts forward a version of this interpretation that makes room for pure judgments of ugliness. Küplen agrees with Guyer that in order for us to have any perceptual experience we must apply some empirical concept to the manifold (Küplen, 2015, p.63). A determinate cognitive judgment always precedes the judgments of taste. Usually, however, the concept we apply does not fully specify how to compose the manifold (Küplen, 2015, p.64-5). If I see a dog, the concept of 'dog' specifies that it should be a four-legged mammal, with a snout, a

tail, a wet nose etc. But every particular dog has many more features that are not included in the concept – their fur has a particular color and texture, they have different sizes, different proportions between their parts. The concept cannot provide a rule for the composition of this particularized features of the manifold. With respect to these additional features that are not entailed by the concept, understanding cannot constraint imagination, which to this extent is free (Küplen, 2015, p.67).

This interpretation finds textual support in Kant's claim that while in its cognitive function imagination is under the limitation of being adequate to a concept:

“[...] in an aesthetic respect, however, the imagination is free to provide, beyond that concord with the concept, unsought extensive undeveloped material for the understanding, *of which the latter took no regard in its concept*, but which it applies, not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, for the animation of the cognitive powers” (KU, AA 05: 316-7, my emphasis).

According to Küplen, the key to understand free harmony as well as to accommodate pure judgments of ugliness is the distinction between the free play of imagination and the free harmony between imagination and understanding (Küplen, 2013, p.117-8). “Free play” amounts to imagination free activity in the composition of the features of the manifold not determined by the concept we apply. We engage in free harmony when the free play of imagination is in accordance with the lawfulness of understanding (what exactly this amounts to is hard to grasp; but let's suppose we can make sense out of it). Free harmony grounds judgments of beauty. By parity, when the free play of imagination is not in agreement with the lawfulness of the understanding we have free disharmony, which grounds judgments of ugliness (Küplen, 2013, p.136).

This interpretation can account for Kant's main example of aesthetic neutrality: regular forms. Regular forms are those that “cannot be represented except by being regarded as mere presentations of a determinate concept, which prescribes the rule for that shape” (KU, AA 05: 241). The circle is a regular form because we regard a particular circle as a mere presentation of the concept of 'circle' and, thus, as containing *only* the combination of the manifold which is prescribed by that concept. The suggestion is that we see regular shapes as completely determined by their concept – there are no additional features with respect to which imagination could be free. Since in contemplating these forms there is no free play of imagination they cannot be beautiful nor ugly.

This approach has, therefore, the advantage of accounting smoothly for the possibility of three aesthetic values. A worry may arise, however, that it imposes an artificial restriction on the scope of the aesthetically neutral. Neutrality in this interpretation is explained in terms of the absence of additional features that could open up space for imagination's free activity. Even if we do admit that regular

forms are completely determined by their concept, we must recognize that that is not the case with most objects. Dogs, flowers, houses, valleys, chairs – no instance of these concepts is completely determined by them (for the simple reason that the concept must be somewhat abstract in order to cover all its instances). Most objects leave some space for the free play of imagination and must be, therefore, either beautiful or ugly. But that cannot be right: surely there are dogs that are neither beautiful nor ugly as there are chairs that are neither even though they cannot at all be regarded as a mere presentation of the concept of chair (consider a one-legged armchair).

Even if this problem could be avoided, the extra-feature interpretation would face the same problem Guyer's interpretation faced: it makes free harmony or disharmony depend on the concept under which the object is subsumed. Consider the anglerfish case again. Peter, who has no concept of 'anglerfish', comes across an anglerfish specimen; he subsumes this particular individual under the concept of 'fish'; the anglerfish, odd as it is, presents a number of features that are not determined by the concept 'fish' and, therefore, plenty of room for the free play of imagination; since this is a very ugly animal, we can presume that in this case the free play of imagination will be in disharmony with understanding, producing the displeasure of taste and grounding a judgment of ugliness. Anna, on the other hand, has the concept of 'anglerfish'; she sees the same specimen Peter sees and, as it turns out, it is a pretty normal anglerfish; the amount of additional features in the manifold not determined by the concept is much smaller in this case, if compared to Peter's perception of the same animal; to be sure, there are some such additional features, but these do not include the features we would usually point out as making anglerfishes ugly: the disproportionate jaws and teeth, the odd proportions of the body, the position of its side fin; it may very well be that, given the restriction in its scope, in this case the free play of imagination will not be in disharmony with understanding. This threatens the claim to universal validity of the judgment of taste, for whether or not we experience the displeasure of taste which grounds the judgment of ugliness will depend on what concept we mobilize in perceiving the object.

The problem here is that as we move to mere specific concepts the room for the free play of imagination gets smaller. One could argue, as does Malcolm Budd, that:

[...] when the object is brought under a concept it was not formerly brought under there will be no change at all in the perception itself, and so no change in the object's perceived form, but only a change in the interpretation of the object (what kind of object it is) [...] if at one time I see a tree but without the ability to identify its kind and at a later time, when I have acquired the ability, see it as aspen, its form is not thereby represented to me differently (Budd, 2008, p.111).

And while that is true, it does not change the fact that the more specific the concept the less additional features are left for the free play of imagination. In order to claim universality for our judgments of taste we would need to establish which concept the manifold should be recognized in – but for Kant the validity of judgments of taste does not depend on the way this question is settled. Budd's claim shows only that the extra-feature interpretation (as well as Guyer's metacognitive interpretation) cannot account for the fact that an object is beautiful or ugly in virtue only of its form. If I see a bird merely as a hummingbird or as a male white-eared hummingbird, its perceived form will be the same, in the latter case, however, the manifold will be almost entirely determined by the concept, so much so that it will be barely plausible to speak of a free play of imagination (according to the extra-feature interpretation). Nevertheless an ornithologist, who knows very well what a male white-eared hummingbird is supposed to look like still may find a specimen of this kind of bird very beautiful.

5. The General Remark: Free Play as Invention

On the one hand, the arguments that motivated Guyer's metacognitive interpretation show that many interpretations of free harmony fail because they cannot account for the fact that we usually know very well what kind of thing a beautiful object is. One *desideratum* any satisfactory account of free harmony must satisfy is this: (a) free harmony is compatible with a determinate cognition of the beautiful object. On the other hand, the metacognitive interpretation fails because it makes the possibility of free harmony depend on the particular concept we apply to the beautiful object. Another *desideratum* for an interpretation of free harmony is, therefore, this: (b) whether or not an object elicits free harmony depends only on the object, particularly on its form, not on the concept under which it is cognized.

Now we can see why it is so hard to make sense of the free harmony of the faculties: (a) and (b) seem to be incompatible. Whether or not an object elicits free harmony, we suppose, depends on two factors: (i) whether or not imagination is free in apprehending the object and (ii) whether or not imagination's activity harmonizes with the lawfulness of the understanding. But, when we have a determinate cognition of an object, imagination is to some extent restrained by a concept; whether and to what extent imagination is free in the cognition of an object depends on the concept applied – the more general and abstract the concept, the more freedom imagination will get. Whether there is free harmony, free disharmony or no free play at all will depend on the concept mobilized in the cognition of the object. It seems, therefore, that if (a) is admitted (b) is precluded.

Can we provide an interpretation of free harmony that makes these *desiderata* compatible? Some underappreciated claims Kant makes in the *General remark on the first section of the Analytic* suggest that the actual freedom of the imagination in the apprehension of an object is not, contrary to all the interpretations considered so far, necessary for the object to be deemed beautiful. This points the way to a different understanding of the free harmony. Consider this passage:

[...] if in the judgment of taste the imagination must be considered in its freedom, then it is in the first instance taken not as reproductive, as subjected to the laws of association, but as productive and self-active (as the authoress of voluntary forms of possible intuitions); and although *in the apprehension of a given object of the senses it is of course bound to a determinate form of this object and to this extent has no free play* (as in invention), nevertheless it is still quite conceivable that the object can provide it with a form that contains precisely such a composition of the manifold as the imagination would design in harmony with the lawfulness of the understanding in general if it were left free by itself. (*KU*, AA 05: 240-1, my emphasis)

One of the cognitive functions of the imagination is to perform the syntheses of apprehension.⁹ It is at this point that imagination composes the manifold of intuition and this is where its freedom can manifest. In this passage, however, Kant claims that, in the apprehension of an object, imagination is “bound to a determinate form of this object and to this extent has no free play”. The suggestion is clear (and reinforced by the claim that, in other circumstances it could be “left free by itself”): in its cognitive function imagination is never actually free. But the reason for this is not that understanding imposes a rule upon imagination that completely determines it. Rather, imagination is said to be bound to the form of the *object*. That makes sense as a tenet of Empirical Realism: if we think of ourselves as faced with objects that do not depend on us for existing or for being what they are, then we cannot think of imagination, in so far as it is oriented to the apprehension of those objects, as free to compose the manifold of an object as it will – given that there is a way the object actually is, there is a way imagination *must* compose the manifold. This accords with the claim that we regard objects “as that which is opposed to our cognitions being determined at pleasure or arbitrarily” (*KrV*, A104).

But if there is always a rule for the composition of the manifold and when confronted with an object imagination is never actually free, how is the free play

⁹See *KrV*, A98-103. According to this passage, a cognition is made possible by three distinct syntheses: the “synthesis of apprehension” in which we “run through” and “take together” the manifold; the “synthesis of reproduction in imagination”, through which an apprehended representation is associated and combined with other representations and the “synthesis of recognition in a concept” in which a concept is finally applied to the manifold, resulting in a cognition. Kant’s claim, in the quoted passage, that we should not take imagination as reproductive when we think of it as free, suggests that the activity of the imagination in the second step of the threefold syntheses is irrelevant to the judgment of taste.

possible? In the passage quoted, Kant claims that an object can have a form that contains exactly the composition of the manifold that imagination “would design in harmony with the lawfulness of the understanding in general *if it were left free by itself*”. If imagination cannot be free in the apprehension of objects, how could it be left free? Kant claims that when we consider imagination in its freedom we take it as productive of “voluntary forms of possible intuitions”. This idea of the freedom of imagination as the freedom to create forms for *possible* (not actual) intuitions, combined with the claim that in cognition imagination has no free play as it has “in invention” and that an object can have a form imagination would *design* if left free, suggests that imagination is free when it create forms. This is reinforced by the remark about “beautiful views” in the last paragraph of the *General Remark*:

[...] beautiful objects are to be distinguished from beautiful views of objects (which on account of the distance can often no longer be distinctly cognized). In the latter, taste seems to fasten not so much on what the imagination *apprehends* in this field as on what gives it occasion to *invent*, i.e., on what are strictly speaking the fantasies with which the mind entertains itself while it is being continuously aroused by the manifold which strikes the eye, as for instance in looking at the changing shapes of a fire in a hearth or of a rippling brook, neither of which are beauties, but both of which carry with them a charm for the imagination, because they sustain its free play. (*KU*, AA 05: 243-4)

The fantasies of the imagination “sustain its free play” because in this case it needs not concern itself with the apprehension of objects and has occasion to *invent*. To consider imagination in its freedom (i.e., as engaged in free play) is, therefore, to conceive of it as engaged in an activity that is imaginative in the ordinary sense – the fanciful creation of forms. If I say to you: “imagine a flower” your imagination engages in an activity that is somewhat free, because you can imagine any flower you want (you are not bound to the determinate form of an object of cognition), but not completely free, because it will be restricted by the concept of flower in general. That activity can be completely free when imagination is left free to create forms without any guidance whatsoever being provided by determinate concepts (we can think, for instance, of the work of an abstract painter in this way).

But surely there are beautiful *objects*. If imagination is not free in apprehending these, how can they elicit free play? One could suggest that an object is beautiful when it is such as to lead imagination to its free inventive activity. We would have then to conceive of imagination as playing two distinct roles in the judgment of taste: first, it would be employed in the cognition of the object and, at this stage, its activity would not be free; second, the object's form, as apprehended, could arouse it, leading to the fanciful activity of creating forms and thus to free play. This, proposal, however, does not fit the text. In the passage just quoted, Kant distinguish between beautiful objects and beautiful views and he clearly states that

in the case of beautiful objects (as opposed to beautiful views) taste fasten on what imagination *apprehends* and not on what it invents.

What Kant's claims in the *General Remark* actually imply is that whether or not an object elicits the free play of imagination is *irrelevant* to whether or not it is beautiful. For, on the one hand, if imagination is in free play when it is inventing, not apprehending, and when we derive pleasure from imagination's inventive activity (i.e., its free play) aroused by an object what we are dealing with are beautiful views and not a beautiful object, then an object can induce the free play of imagination (and, further, a free play which accords with the lawfulness of the understanding) without being beautiful (as is the case of the rippling brook, for instance). And, on the other hand, if a beautiful object happens to arouse the free creative activity of imagination, that cannot be the ground on which it is declared beautiful, for when it comes to beautiful objects pleasure is to be derived from reflecting on its form as apprehended by imagination and not on what that form gives occasion for imagination to invent.

This conclusion seems to be diametrically opposed to the conclusions of the *Analytic of the Beautiful*, but Kant quickly dismisses any concern about his previous conclusions by pointing to the fact that an object can present a form that contains exactly the combination of the manifold imagination would design in harmony with the lawfulness of the understanding *if left free*. This move suggests that it does not really matter to the judgment of taste whether imagination is actually free in apprehending the form of the beautiful object (which, we are now told, is not the case) or whether it merely proceeds in composing the manifold as it *would* proceed if left free. And the fact that these considerations occur in the *General Remark* at the end of the *Analytic* indicates that they should be taken as a cautionary advice (aimed at clarifying an anticipated misunderstanding) about how to comprehend the thesis laid down in the section it closes.

We can make sense of the claims in the *General Remark* if we think of the free harmony of the faculties as a state of mind that merely provides a model for the activity of the imagination in apprehending a beautiful object. According to this proposal an object is beautiful when its form corresponds to a fanciful form imagination would conjure in its free inventive activity (when in harmony with understanding). In apprehending a beautiful object imagination is not free – there is a way it must compose the manifold in order to apprehend the object as it actually is. Nevertheless, the way imagination *must* proceed in composing the manifold corresponds exactly to a way it *would* proceed if left free. The beautiful object does not elicit the free play of imagination, which is characteristic of its inventive function, but provides an occasion for imagination to proceed *in its cognitive function* as it would proceed in its inventive function. In apprehending a beautiful object imagination emulates its free creative activity, even though it is not free to

compose the manifold as it pleases. And Kant suggests this is enough to ground a judgment of taste.

This proposal has a couple of advantages. First, it can account for *desiderata* (a) and (b) that caused problems for other interpretations. It does so by claiming that whether or not an object is beautiful does not depend on the extent to which imagination is free in composing the manifold of the object when apprehending it, but rather on the correspondence between the form of the object to a form imagination would come up with if engaged in a free creative activity. Whether we recognize the manifold in a concept and what concept we recognize it in is irrelevant to the beauty of the object. Second, it accounts for the often neglected claims of the *General Remark*. One could worry, however, that it is unable to account for the connection between free harmony and the pleasure of taste, given that it severs the connection between the apprehension of the beautiful object and a full-blown state of free play of the imagination.

Kant does suggest that the pleasure of taste is nothing but our mode of awareness of an actual state of free harmony. Judgments of taste, we are told, “must rest on a mere sensation of the reciprocally animating imagination in its freedom and the understanding with its lawfulness” (*KU*, AA 05: 287). Nevertheless, in light of the *General Remark*, this suggestion cannot be taken literally. If imagination is literally set into a state of free play, then it is left free to design or invent forms. If the pleasure of taste was the sensation of this state (on the condition that it agrees with the lawfulness of understanding), then the pleasure of taste would be pleasure in the inventive state aroused by an object. But, as attested by Kant's example of the rippling brook, an object cannot be declared beautiful on that ground. And if one claims that the pleasure of taste is the sensation of free harmony *in the apprehension of an object*, one plainly contradicts Kant's claim that in apprehending an object imagination has no free play. We should, then, take the *General Remark* as qualifying the claim that the pleasure of taste is our mode of awareness of a state of mind of free play. Rather it is our mode of awareness of a state of mind in which the activity of the imagination in apprehending the form of an object *emulates* the activity of the creative imagination in composing that same manifold in accordance with the lawfulness of the understanding. We can provide support for this interpretation by explaining why, according to Kant, we should be aware of such a state of mind in the form of pleasure and by showing that this explanation amounts to Kant's explanation of the source of the pleasure of taste.

Consider first how are we to conceive of free harmony according to this proposal. We get free harmony when the free play of imagination harmonizes with the lawfulness of understanding. As a first approach to explaining free harmony we could say this: imagination in its truly free creative activity comes up with forms for possible intuitions without being guided by concepts; in this sense imagination

is not constrained by a determinate law that specifies “how its product should be” and there cannot be an *objective correspondence* between its product and understanding (*KU*, AA 05: 241); nevertheless, the forms it comes up with can agree with or offend the *lawfulness* of the understanding without agreeing or offending any particular law. What this amounts to can be explained in the same way other interpretations of the free harmony explain it: we could say with Guyer that in this case understanding’s underlying interest in unity is being satisfied in a way that is not accounted for in terms of the conformity to a concept or we could say with Ginsborg that in such cases we just have a primitive sense that imagination is proceeding in a proper way. When the forms imagination creates agree with the lawfulness of understanding we get free harmony. This description of free harmony is restricted to the realm of the inventive activity of the imagination. We explain the connection between the free harmony and the beauty of actual objects (that imagination has to apprehend and not create) in the following way: if an object has a form that contains exactly the composition of the manifold imagination would come up with in its creative activity when in agreement with the lawfulness of understanding, the object is beautiful.

Now, why the apprehension of an object whose form correspond to the combination of the manifold imagination would freely create in harmony with the lawfulness of understanding elicits the peculiar pleasure of taste? Or rather, why should we be aware in the form of pleasure of the fact that imagination is, in apprehending the object, proceeding as it would proceed in creative free harmony? To answer this question we have to take a look at what Kant has to say about the *Principle of Purposiveness*.

Understanding is the faculty of concepts. Empirical concepts have to be acquired. Finding concepts (finding the universal to a particular) is the task of the *Reflective Power of Judgment* (*KU*, AA 05: 179). This power is guided in its activity by the Principle of Purposiveness (*KU*, AA 05: 181). This principle represents nature in a particular way, namely, “as a system for our power of judgment, in which the manifold, divided into genera and species, makes it possible to bring all the natural forms that are forthcoming to concepts” (*EEKU*, AA 20: 212). Furthermore, this principle gives a law only to the Reflective Power of Judgment, not to nature itself (*KU*, 05: 180). This principle “attributes nothing at all to the object (of nature), but rather only represents the unique way in which we must proceed in reflection on the objects of nature” (*KU*, AA 05: 184). The principle does not determine nature, but only our way of approaching it – in this sense it is a subjective principle. Consequently, there is no guarantee that nature conforms to this principle. For this reason, “we are also delighted” when we find this principle realized in nature (*KU*, AA 05: 184) – that is, when we find a systematic unity in nature. This feeling of pleasure is actually the only thing the Power of Judgment can determine for itself and, Kant adds, if a feeling of pleasure

is to be grounded on an *a priori* principle (as is the case of the pleasure of taste) that can only be the *a priori* principle of the power of judgment (*EEKU*, AA 20: 208).

Kant claims that judgments of taste are reflective judgments (*EEKU*, AA 20: 223-4) and that it is only properly in taste that “the power of judgment reveals itself as a faculty that has its own special principle” (*EEKU*, AA 20: 244). Indeed, the principle of taste “is the subjective principle of the power of judgment in general” (*KU*, AA 05: 286). The principle of taste is what guides our judgments of taste; these judgments are grounded only on the pleasure or displeasure we experience in contemplating an object; therefore, the principle of taste is what determines these feelings; presumably then, the pleasure and displeasure of taste are the pleasure and displeasure that the Power of Judgment, guided by the Principle of Purposiveness, can determine. That is confirmed by Kant's claim that a beautiful object does reveal a systematicity in nature that is in accordance with the Principle of Purposiveness:

The self-sufficient beauty of nature reveals to us a technique of nature, which makes it possible to represent it as a system in accordance with laws the principle of which we do not encounter anywhere in our entire faculty of understanding, namely that of a purposiveness with respect to the use of the power of judgment in regard to appearances (*KU*, AA 05: 246).

Nature is declared technical when it conforms to the principle of the power of judgment: “the power of judgment is properly technical; nature is represented technically only insofar as it conforms to that procedure of the power of judgment and makes it necessary” (*EEKU*, AA 20: 220). It is then safe to conclude that, for Kant, an object is beautiful when it conforms to the principle that guides the procedure of the power of judgment, that is, the Principle of Purposiveness,¹⁰ and that the pleasure we connect necessarily and *a priori* to the apprehension of the beautiful object is grounded in the satisfaction of this principle.

The idea that we could find out that nature presents (or does not present) a systematic unity by empirically investigating it and considering it (or part of it) as whole with a view to the possibility of finding laws that can account for the great variety of particular natural laws we observe is reasonably clear. Judgments of taste, however, are always about a particular object and do not involve comparing it to other objects (*KU*, AA 05: 215). If the Principle of Purposiveness is supposed to be the principle of taste then it must be possible for an object to be in conformity or not with the Principle of Purposiveness regardless of how it fits on the system of nature. How can we comprehend that?

Kant explains the subjective principle of the power of judgment as “[...] a command of our power of judgment to proceed in accordance with the principle of the suitability of nature to our faculty of cognition as far as it reaches” (*KU*, AA 05:

¹⁰This point is made by Küplen (2015, p.79-80).

188). What the principle requires (but cannot guarantee) is that nature be suitable to our faculty of cognition. The idea of beauty as the correspondence of the form of an object to a form freely created by imagination in accordance with the lawfulness of understanding allow us to comprehend how a beautiful object indicates the suitability of nature to our cognitive capacities. If the world had been created by a mind like ours whose faculties were in harmony (that is, a mind with an imagination like ours and an understanding that seeks systematic unity in nature working together), then it would necessarily adjust to the expectations of our cognitive powers and we could be sure the subjective principle of the power of judgment would be perfectly satisfied. A particular beautiful object, on account of its form, conforms to the Principle of Purposiveness regardless of how it fits on the system on nature because it is the kind of thing that would have a place in a world create by a mind like ours for a mind like ours and, thus, is perfectly suitable for our cognitive powers. We become aware of the conformity of the object to the Principle of Purposiveness in the form of the pleasure of taste. This thought is eloquently captured by Phillips' claim that the "pleasure of beauty is the pleasure in the world's seeming willingness to be known" (Phillips, 2001, p.394).

According to this interpretation, what the reflective power of judgment does is to ascertain that the activity of the imagination and the understanding in the apprehension of a particular object corresponds (abstraction made from their current cognitive employment) to a model for their relation – the state of free harmony. This fits rather well with the way in which Kant describes a reflecting judgment:

[...] in a merely reflecting judgment imagination and understanding are considered in the relation to each other in which they must stand in the power of judgment in general, as compared with the relation in which they actually stand in the case of a given perception. (*EKU*, AA 20: 220)

According to Kant, the power of judgment can be identified with the "subjective formal condition of all judgments" (*KU*, AA 05: 287). When we consider only the formal condition of judgments we abstract from their content, which is given by concepts. Nevertheless, the subjective condition of judgments "requires the agreement of two powers of representation" (*KU*, AA 05: 287). We can infer that the relation in which imagination and understanding must stand in the power of judgment in general is characterized by their agreement without the specification of a concept, that is, a relation of free harmony. What the reflective power of judgment does, therefore, is to compare the relation in which imagination and understanding actually stand in a perception to the free harmony. If there is a match, if imagination composes the manifold in the apprehension of an object as it would compose it if left free for itself and in agreement with the lawfulness of understanding, we become aware of it in the form of the pleasure of taste.

6. Conclusion

Any reasonable interpretation of free harmony must account for two *desiderata*: (a) that free harmony is compatible with a determinate cognition of the beautiful object and that (b) what concept the object is subsumed under is irrelevant to determine whether or not it elicits free harmony. Guyer has forcefully argued against a number of interpretation on the grounds that they fail to account for (a). His own metacognitive interpretation as well as variations on it (such as Küplen's extra-feature interpretation) fail, however, because they cannot account for (b). I have outlined an alternative interpretation that can account for both these *desiderata*. This interpretation involves a reconsideration of the place of free harmony in Kant's theory. It is no longer conceived of as a state of mind that actually takes place in the apprehension of a beautiful object, but as a state of mind that is emulated in that apprehension. The proposed interpretation can account for the connection between the Principle of Purposiveness and the pleasure of taste. And while it conflicts with Kant's suggestion in the *Analytic of the Beautiful* and elsewhere that the pleasure of taste is simply our mode of awareness of a state of free harmony, it is motivated by and agrees with the ideas exposed in the *General Remark*. Its plausibility depends then on the ascription of a certain interpretative prevalence to the text of the *General Remark* which, on its turn, is justified by its position as a subsequent commentary to the conclusions of the *Analytic* and by the difficulties faced by the interpretations that do not acknowledge it.

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Abstract. Despite its centrality to Kant's account of judgments of taste, the notion of free harmony is remarkably hard to grasp. The difficulty springs, I argue, from the fact that any interpretation of this notion has to account for two *desiderata* that conflict under the assumption that concepts restrict imagination's freedom in composing the manifold of intuition: (a) that free harmony is compatible with a determinate cognition of the beautiful object and (b) what concept the object is subsumed under is irrelevant to determine whether or not it elicits free harmony. Guyer has objected to a number of interpretations on the ground that they cannot account for (a). I argue that Guyer's own metacognitive interpretation fails because it cannot account for (b). Based on some claims in the *General remark on the first section of the Analytic*, I outline an interpretation of free harmony that can make (a) and (b) compatible.

Keywords: Beauty, Taste, Free Play, Free Harmony, Imagination.

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