

The Concept of Interest and Kant's Distinction between the Beautiful and the Agreeable

Miles Rind*

ABSTRACT. In the exposition of the first moment of the judgment of taste, Kant argues that the satisfaction in the beautiful, or “favor,” is the only “free” satisfaction, because it alone is not determined by interests. Examination of what Kant means by “interest” shows that, even if this argument is effective in application to the distinction between favor and the satisfaction in the good, it fails in application to the distinction between favor and the satisfaction in the agreeable. The thesis that favor is the only “free” satisfaction does not, however, depend essentially on the concept of interest; in fact, Kant's argument is strengthened by being reformulated without that concept.

I. Kant's Aims

Kant asserts in the title of §1 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that “the judgment of taste is aesthetic” (5:203).¹ By “the judgment of taste”

*Email: mrind.ac@gmail.com

¹ Quotations not otherwise attributed are from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Other texts by Kant that I shall quote in translation are “First Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*,” in the same volume, and *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Page references are to *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, ed. German Academy of Sciences (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1900–), the page numbers of which appear in the margins of the translations. For the sake of uniformity, I have replaced the italic type used for emphasis in Gregor's translation with bold type, following Guyer and Matthews (and the original editions).

he means, roughly, the judgment that some object of one's experience is beautiful.² By calling the judgment "aesthetic" he means, again roughly, that it is based on one's being pleased by the object — one's "satisfaction in" it.³ The remainder of Kant's exposition of this "moment of the judgment of taste, according to quality" (5:203) is an attempt to explain what distinguishes this kind of satisfaction from other kinds. Kant recognizes just two other kinds, the satisfaction in the agreeable and the satisfaction in the good, both of which he holds to be "combined with interest" (§3, 5:205; §4, 5:207). The satisfaction in the beautiful, by contrast, he holds to be "without any interest" (§2, 5:204). More specifically, he says that it is "disinterested," and therefore the only "free" satisfaction (§5, 5:210).

To reduce verbiage, I shall hereafter employ the following terms, derived from expressions that Kant introduces in §5: for "satisfaction in the

² Only "roughly," for two reasons. First, Kant allows that one might declare an object beautiful on the basis of the judgments of others or on the basis of one's own judgments on other objects of the same kind; but he holds that in such cases one is not making a genuine judgment of taste. See §8, 5:215; §32, 5:282; and Miles Rind, "Kant's Beautiful Roses: A Reply to Cohen's 'Second Problem,'" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 65–74. Second, some commentators take Kant to hold, or at least to allow, that a pure judgment of taste can be logically negative ("X is not beautiful") or aesthetically unfavorable ("X is ugly"). I have argued against this view in "Can Kant's Deduction of Judgments of Taste Be Saved?", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 84 (2002): 20–45, esp. 26–30, and in the publication previously cited. Nonetheless, it is an interpretative option that must be considered.

³ "Roughly," again, for two reasons: first, because I am setting aside the possibility of a judgment based on dissatisfaction (see the previous note); and second, because an aesthetic judgment on Kant's definition is "one whose determining ground **cannot be other than subjective**" (§1, 5:203). Kant does not here explain what this means, but in section VII of the "Introduction," he says that "the subjective aspect in a representation which cannot become an element of cognition at all is the pleasure or displeasure connected with it" (5:188–189). Similarly, he says in §3 that "a determination of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure ... does not serve for any cognition at all" (5:206). So an aesthetic judgment is a judgment whose determining ground "cannot be other than subjective" in the sense that it cannot be used for cognition, and such a determining ground consists in the determination of pleasure or displeasure — the satisfaction or dissatisfaction — connected with the representation.

The construction "satisfaction in" is used by Guyer and Matthews, and before them by J. H. Bernard (*Critique of Judgement* (London: Macmillan, 1894)), to render Kant's *Wohlgefallen an*. Though the phrase is at best antiquated English, I shall use the same construction.

beautiful," "favor"; for "satisfaction in the good," "esteem"; and for "satisfaction in the agreeable," "gratification."⁴

Discussion of Kant's argument has primarily occupied itself with his thesis that favor is without interest. His thesis that gratification is combined with interest has received much less attention. It will be the primary object of my attention here. I shall argue, first, that Kant fails to establish this thesis; second, that he cannot even coherently maintain it; and third, that he can better achieve his aims without using the concept of interest at all.

II. Kant's Conception of Interest

What does it mean, in Kant's terms, for a satisfaction to be either "combined with interest" or "without any interest"? One thing that is clear is that the two phrases are logically complementary; that is, a satisfaction is without any interest just in case it is not combined with an interest. But Kant distinguishes between two ways in which a satisfaction may be combined with an interest: it may be "grounded on" one, or it may "produce" one (§2, 5:205n.). A satisfaction not grounded on an interest he describes as "disinterested" (*uninteressiert*; §2, 5:205 and n.; §5, 5:210).

This terminology, though Kant is clear and explicit about it, is frequently confused by commentators. Because confusion on this point can lead to substantive errors of interpretation, it is worth taking a moment to stress it: In Kant's use of terms, "combined with interest" means "grounded on or producing an interest"; "without any interest" means "neither grounded on nor producing an interest"; and "disinterested" means "not grounded on an interest." This is the use of terms that I shall follow here.

But what does Kant mean by "interest"? His definition of the term is notoriously recondite:

The satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Hence such a satisfaction al-

⁴ "**Agreeable** is that which everyone calls what **gratifies** [*vergnügt*] him; **beautiful**, what merely **pleases** [*gefällt*] him; **good**, what is **esteemed** [*geschätzt*], **approved** [*gebilligt*], i.e., that on which he sets an objective value" (§5, 5:209; "approved" is added in the second edition). Later in the same paragraph, Kant introduces the term "favor [*Gunst*]" for the satisfaction in the beautiful.

ways has at the same time a relation to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground or else as necessarily interconnected with its determining ground. (§2, 5:204)

The passage raises at least two questions. First, what does it mean to combine a satisfaction with “the representation of the existence of an object”? Second, how does Kant draw the inference that such a satisfaction is always related to the faculty of desire? His use of the word “hence” indicates that he considers the implication to be obvious; but it is nothing of the sort. There are not even any terms common to the two propositions. He draws a similar inference in §4, where, after distinguishing between what is “good for something” and what is “good in itself,” he says of these two varieties of goodness:

Both always involve the concept of an end, hence the relation of reason to (at least possible) willing, and consequently a satisfaction in the **existence** of an object or of an action, i.e., some sort of interest. (5:207)

This tells us that Kant thinks of volition as necessarily connected with a satisfaction in the existence of an object or of an action (“existence of an action” here presumably meaning “performance of an action”), but it does not tell us why. Kant asserts an even stronger connection at the end of the section, where he says that “to will something and to have satisfaction in its existence, i.e., to take an interest in it, are identical” (5:209). Similarly, in the “First Introduction,” he identifies “the feeling of pleasure and displeasure in [an object’s] existence” with “the determination of the faculty of desire to produce it” (sec. III, 20:206).

Some light is provided by the definition of the faculty of desire that Kant gives in a footnote in the “Introduction” as “the faculty of being through one’s representations the cause of the reality of the objects of these representations” (sec. III, 5:177n., emphasis omitted).⁵ “Reality” (*Wirklichkeit*) here is presumably equivalent to “existence” (*Existenz*, or

⁵ The passage is a quotation from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:9n.; the footnote is added in the second edition of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. A similar footnote in the “First Introduction” (sec. VII, 20:230n.) contains the same quotation.

Dasein.) in the other passages. From this it is evident that the conceptual connection between the faculty of desire and existence consists in the fact that the former is the faculty of bringing into existence the objects of one's representations, by means of — that is, guided by — those representations. Moreover, according to Kant, in human beings the faculty of desire is the will, which is a faculty of desire that “operates in accordance with concepts” (sec. I, 5:172); it is “determinable only through concepts, i.e., [only determinable] to act in accordance with the representation of an end” (§10, 5:220). So to will an object, on Kant's conception, is to use a concept to bring into existence an object corresponding to that concept. One has to assume that Kant is using “object” here in a broad sense to include actions and states of affairs.

It remains to be understood how this is supposed to involve pleasure. One point that is clear is that Kant understands interest to be something implicit in volition itself, prior to and independently of the realization of the object of volition: merely to will something, whether or not one succeeds in bringing it into existence, involves taking an interest in it. How, then, can Kant define interest as a satisfaction in the object's existence? How can one have a satisfaction in the existence of something that does not yet exist?

It seems to me that there is only one plausible answer, namely that Kant is speaking of an *expected* or *anticipated* satisfaction in the existence of the object, or more precisely of the expectation itself. There are several passages in Kant's other writings that confirm this interpretation. Kant defines an interest in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* as “the dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles of reason” and as “that by which reason becomes practical” (4:413n. and 4:459n.), and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* as “an **incentive** of the will so far as it is **represented by reason**” (5:79). These passages make clear that interests arise when and only when practical reason is involved: they do not arise merely from our having a desire or an inclination. That an interest concerns a merely possible object is clear from a passage in the *Metaphysics of Morals* in which Kant says that “every determination of choice proceeds **from the representation of a possible** [n.b.] **action to** the deed through the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, taking an interest in the action or its effect” (6:399). The passage indicates that the taking of an

interest mediates between the representation of a possible action and the deed itself: thus, again, the interest is inherent in the volition — the “determination of choice [*Willkür*]” — with or without the realization of its object. Finally, two passages in the *Critique of Practical Reason* make clear that what Kant calls a pleasure or satisfaction in the existence or reality of an object is something that precedes that existence or reality:

The representation of an object and that relation of the representation to the subject by which the faculty of desire is determined to realize the object ... is called *pleasure* in the reality of an object. (5:21)

Pleasure arising from the representation of the existence of a thing ... is, then, practical only insofar as the feeling of agreeableness that the subject expects [n.b.] from the reality of an object determines the faculty of desire. (5:22)

Although Kant does not use the word “interest” here, it is plain that he is using the concept as defined in the third *Critique*, and the last passage shows clearly that when he speaks of the “satisfaction in the existence of an object,” he means an *expectation* of satisfaction.

From these considerations we can explicate Kant’s forms of expression as follows. When he says of the satisfaction in some object that it is grounded on an interest, he means that it depends on a prior volition-based expectation of satisfaction in the existence of an object of the pertinent kind. When he says that a satisfaction produces an interest, he means that it produces such an expectation. When he says that a satisfaction is disinterested, he means that it does not depend on any such expectation. And when he says that a satisfaction is without any interest, he means that it neither depends on nor produces such an expectation.

Now Kant’s first thesis about the satisfaction in the beautiful is, according to the heading of §2, that it is “without any interest.” This would mean that it neither produces nor depends on a prior volition. In §5, however, the conclusion that Kant draws from the preceding sections is more specific: it is that such satisfaction is disinterested, and therefore “free,” and indeed uniquely so (§5, 5:210). I shall examine this passage in detail later. For the present, the point that I wish to take from it is that Kant’s thesis about what distinguishes favor from the other kinds of satisfaction

is not merely that it is without any interest but more specifically that it is *disinterested*, that is, not grounded on any interest.

The implication of this passage for the argument of the exposition as a whole is that what Kant must establish concerning gratification and esteem is not simply that they are combined with interest, but specifically that they are grounded on it. In the case of esteem, it is not difficult to see how Kant derives this conclusion, provided that we are clear about what sort of case he is talking about. Kant does not say that a satisfaction accompanies the bare judgment that a thing of a certain kind is good. Rather, his implied view is that such a judgment gives rise to an interest, that is, an expectation of satisfaction in the existence of objects of the specified kind. In the passage previously quoted from §4, he says that calling a thing good always involves an interest because it involves “the relation of reason to (at least possible) willing” (5:207). His point is that to judge that a thing of a certain kind to be good is to regard it as an actual or possible object of volition. If one makes it an actual object of volition then one necessarily takes an interest in it. Consequently, if one brings about the object of one’s volition, or if (in the case in which the object is not itself an action) one encounters such an object, one experiences satisfaction in the attainment of one’s aim. So the satisfaction that accompanies encountering such an object is necessarily grounded on an antecedent interest in things of its kind.

How or whether Kant can also establish that gratification is grounded on interest is another question, to which I now turn.

III. “The Agreeable” and Interest

One might not expect a term like “agreeable” to be subject to a technical definition — but only if one hasn’t read much Kant. Kant defines it as “**that which pleases the senses in sensation**” (§3, 5:205). Examples that he gives of things that one might find agreeable include foods (§4, 5:208), wines, colors, tones of musical instruments (all §7, 5:212), scents (§8, 5:215), and the “agreeable exhaustion that follows ... an agitation by the play of affects” (“General Remark,” 5:273). He also speaks of what he terms “agreeable arts,” which include “all those charms that can gratify

the company at a table, such as telling entertaining stories, getting the company talking in an open and lively manner, [and] creating by means of jokes and laughter a certain tone of merriment" (§44, 5:305). These are certainly innocuous examples of things to which the word "agreeable" (or the German *angenehm*.) would ordinarily be applied. But given Kant's technical definition of the term, the examples imply that the pleasures of social intercourse derive from bodily sensation. That this is in fact Kant's view is also suggested by his attribution of the pleasures of humor to the sensation of the agitation of one's viscera by laughter (§53, 5:332). One might prefer to think that the pleasure arises from the play of words and ideas rather than from the play of one's innards. But Kant is driven to a physiological explanation by his understanding of agreeableness as sensory pleasure.

Kant's argument for the thesis that the satisfaction in the agreeable is combined with interest is stated in a single sentence:

Now that my judgment about an object by which I declare it agreeable expresses an interest in it is already clear from the fact that through sensation it excites a desire for objects of the same sort, hence the satisfaction presupposes not the mere judgment about [the object] but the relation of its existence to my state insofar as it is affected by such an object. (5:207)⁶

⁶ I have inserted a noun phrase where the translation employs the pronoun "it" ambiguously (indeed misleadingly, as it seems to refer to "satisfaction"). Any possible uncertainty about the reference of the various occurrences of that pronoun in the passage can be banished by reading the original text, which I quote from the edition of Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1957), 119: "Daß nun mein Urteil über einen Gegenstand, wodurch ich ihn [=den Gegenstand] für angenehm erkläre, ein Interesse an demselben ausdrücke, ist daraus schon klar, daß es [=das Urteil] durch Empfindung eine Begierde nach dergleichen Gegenständen rege macht, mithin das Wohlgefallen nicht das bloße Urteil über ihn [=den Gegenstand], sondern die Beziehung seiner Existenz auf meinen Zustand, sofern er [=mein Zustand] durch ein solches Objekt affiziert wird, vorausgesetzt." Wilhelm Windelband in the Academy edition and Heiner F. Klemme in his edition (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001; at 52) change the phrase "dergleichen Gegenständen," which appears in all three editions of the work published in Kant's lifetime, to "dergleichen Gegenstand" ("an object of that sort"). I see no reason to do this, and I certainly do not regard it as sound editorial practice to alter a grammatically coherent passage to suit one's opinion of what the author meant, much less to do so without indicating the fact to

It is clear that the argument rests on the single premise that a judgment of agreeableness on an object excites through sensation a desire for objects of its kind. And it is clear that from this observation Kant derives two conclusions: that the judgment expresses an interest in the object, and that the satisfaction in the object presupposes a certain relation of its existence to my state. But it is not clear whether the first conclusion is supposed to support the second or vice versa, how either of them is supposed to follow from the premise, or what any of this is supposed to show about the connection between gratification and interest.

Consider first the premise that a judgment of agreeableness on an object excites through sensation a desire for objects of its kind. If this is meant as a strictly universal proposition then it is obviously false. One may, after all, find something agreeable and not desire any more of it, or any more things of its kind — for instance, if one has had enough of it, or of them. Perhaps all that Kant means is that what we find agreeable stimulates desire until satiation, or that it stimulates desire in most instances, or that it can raise desire for objects of the given kind, or something of the sort. But no matter which interpretation one adopts, it is difficult to see how this proposition implies any connection between gratification and interest. As we have seen, what Kant means by “interest” is a certain component of volition, namely the expectation of satisfaction in the realization of the object of one’s volition. One may, upon finding a given object agreeable, seek to obtain other objects of the same kind, and in that case, one will be taking an interest in objects of that kind. But Kant says nothing in this passage about willing anything. He speaks only of the desire that is raised by an agreeable object; and mere desire, on Kant’s conception, does not imply interest. Only volition does that.

Consider next Kant’s statement that the satisfaction in an object found agreeable depends on “the relation of its existence to my state insofar as it is affected by such an object.” By the latter phrase Kant presumably means the relation of affecting one’s senses so as to generate pleasing sensations. In that sense, the satisfaction depends on the existence of the object. But does this justify Kant’s statement that the judgment of agreeableness “ex-

the reader. In any case, the grammatical change does not affect the import of the passage. Even if Kant meant to write “a desire for an object of that sort,” that phrase can only mean a *general* desire, hence a desire for *objects* of the given sort.

presses an interest” in the object? Not at all; for this is not what we have seen Kant to mean by a satisfaction in the existence of an object in his definition of interest. The fact that the same phrase may be applied in one sense (expectation of satisfaction in the realization of a preconceived object of volition) to one case and in another sense (satisfaction in sensation produced by an existent object) to another case proves nothing.⁷ The fact is that finding an object agreeable neither depends on nor necessitates willing objects of its kind; it therefore has no necessary connection with interest in Kant’s sense.

IV. The Incoherence of Kant’s Position

Now when an interpretation of a great philosopher’s argument leads to the conclusion that the argument is a vain attempt to establish a thesis that contradicts the philosopher’s own views, it is only reasonable to suspect that the interpretation rather than the philosopher is at fault. Let us suppose, therefore, that by “interest” Kant means not an expectation of satisfaction in the realization of a willed object, but an occurrent satisfaction in the existence of an object encountered in experience. Will this supposition free his position of incoherence?

It will not, for several reasons. (1) If “interest” is interpreted in this way then Kant’s conclusion should be that gratification *is* an interest, rather than that it is combined with one. (2) On this interpretation there would be no sense in which an interest in an agreeable object is directed toward a particular *kind* of object: it would simply be the original satisfaction in the individual object itself, and would have nothing to do with any other objects of its kind. (3) Given Kant’s declared view that “to will something

⁷ This objection applies to Henry Allison’s account of Kant’s argument. Allison writes: “Since such a relationship [viz., that of providing pleasing sensations] depends upon the existence of the object of that liking, it is clear that the liking for the agreeable is necessarily connected with existence and, therefore, with interest” (*Kant’s Theory of Taste: A Reading of the “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment.”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91). This does not square with the account that Allison gives in the preceding pages, according to which “what is liked [in interest] is not the mere existence of some object or state of affairs *per se*, but rather its contribution to the attainment of some desired end” (90). Further, the reasoning is subject to the first three of the four objections that I present in the second paragraph of the next section.

and to have satisfaction in its existence, i.e., to take an interest in it, are identical" (§4, 5:209), such an interpretation would commit Kant to the view that everything that strikes us as agreeable becomes by that fact alone an object not simply of inclination but of volition. This, besides being absurd in itself, would be the undoing of his entire practical philosophy, which is founded on the idea that the human will is necessitated by reason alone and not by sensibility. And finally, (4) such a view makes nonsense of Kant's idea of an interest in the good, which includes an interest in actions and ends regardless of whether we succeed in bringing them about. In sum, such an interpretation, far from banishing incoherence, simply propagates it.

Another way in which one might try to solve the problem would be to propose that when Kant defines an interest as "the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object," he does not specifically mean either an expectation of satisfaction or an occurrent satisfaction, but some genus of which those two are species. The satisfaction that one expects from bringing something into existence would be one kind of interest, which attaches to esteem, and the satisfaction that one finds in an object that affects one with pleasing sensations would be another kind, which attaches to gratification.

While such an interpretation may have an appearance of plausibility, it shares with the previously considered proposal the consequences of making the interest in the agreeable identical with the original satisfaction itself (consequence 1 above) and losing the connection with the satisfaction in other objects of the same kind (consequence 2). Worse, such an interpretation posits a genus to which an expectation of satisfaction from the realization of an aim and an occurrent satisfaction in an object of sensation are both supposed to belong as species, but offers no explanation of what this genus is. That is to say, it offers no intelligible concept of interest at all. This interpretation reduces Kant's argument to an empty verbal conjuring act.

Yet another way in which one might try to repair Kant's argument would be to argue that, whatever Kant intended to argue in §3, he could have defended the position that gratification *produces* an interest, and that

this fact distinguishes it from favor.⁸ But for Kant to take this position, he would have to give up his thesis that what distinguishes favor from other kinds of satisfaction is its being disinterested, i.e., not grounded on an interest. Further, this interpretation once again faces the consequence of making all things found agreeable into necessary objects of volition, thereby making nonsense of Kant's moral philosophy (consequence 3).

To avoid this consequence, a reconstruction of Kant on these lines could do either of two things. It could reinterpret the word "interest" to mean something that does not imply volition;⁹ or it could deny the ne-

⁸ Paul Guyer takes this to be Kant's actual argument in *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 158, as does Patricia M. Matthews in *The Significance of Beauty: Kant on Feeling and the System of the Mind* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), 25. Matthews, in contrast to Guyer, recognizes the dire consequences that follow for Kant if he is stuck with the position that whatever is found agreeable becomes thereby the object of an interest (21). She tries to avert them by distinguishing between an object's being a "prima facie object of the will" in the case of gratification and its being an actual object of the will in the case of esteem. By a "prima facie object of the will" she means "the kind of object that I want [i.e., that the subject of volition wants] to exist" (22). Besides being without textual foundation, such a distinction is of dubious intelligibility: a so-called "prima facie object of the will" is not, as such, an object of the will, and therefore not the object of an interest in Kant's sense.

⁹ This option is taken by Nick Zangwill in "Kant on Pleasure in the Agreeable," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995): 167--76, though Zangwill means to be interpreting Kant's definition of interest rather than rewriting it when he says that "an 'interest' is a pleasure that has some kind of necessary connection with desire" (167). David Berger, in *Kant's Aesthetic Theory: The Beautiful and the Agreeable* (London: Continuum, 2009), maintains that Kant operates with two conceptions of interest: a "desire conception" and an "existence conception" (57). Berger provides no argument for this assertion, nor does he attempt any analysis of Kant's explicit definition of interest. The fact that he takes it to be part of the so-called existence conception that certain pleasures are connected with an "interest in the real existence of an object" (60; cf. "interest in that object's existence" and "interest in its existence" on the same page) does not inspire confidence in his interpretation: since Kant defines an interest as a satisfaction in the existence of an object, an interest in the existence of an object would be a satisfaction in the existence of the existence of an object — which is simply nonsense. Berger takes Kant's thesis of the interested character of gratification to be unproblematic on the desire conception, provided that Kant is talking about cases involving food and drink, in which, he presumes, "my pleasure in the food is interested because it is the satisfaction or gratification of a sensuous desire" (58). But Kant's argument relies on the assertion that gratification *gives rise* to a desire, not that it arises from one (§3, 5:207). Though

cessity of the connection of gratification with interest. To take the first option is to retain Kant's verbiage — hardly the most attractive feature of his work — while abandoning his doctrines and arguments. To take the second option, that of weakening the connection of gratification with interest, reduces Kant's thesis that "the satisfaction in the agreeable is combined with interest" from a claim about the essential character of that kind of satisfaction to a mere empirical generalization. To be sure, the basis of Kant's actual argument in §3, namely the premise that the judgment that an object is agreeable excites a desire for objects of its kind, seems to be of this nature. But that is just to say that Kant is as badly off without this reconstruction as with it.

V. Conclusions

From these considerations I draw several negative conclusions. First, Kant fails to establish his thesis that gratification is grounded on an interest. Second, given the concept of interest that he formulates, he cannot coherently maintain this thesis anyway. Third, there is no possible reformulation of his concept that will allow him to maintain the thesis without coming into conflict with other theses that he defends. Fourth, no reconstruction that replaces the thesis that gratification is grounded on an interest with the thesis that gratification produces an interest can be both coherent in itself and plausible as a representation of Kant's thinking. Therefore, and finally, the concept of interest that Kant employs to specify what distinguishes the satisfaction in the beautiful from other kinds of satisfaction, far from serving this aim, only defeats it.

It does not follow, however, that Kant cannot achieve that aim; for he has other resources. I noted earlier that the conclusion that he draws in §5 from the arguments of §§2--4 is that favor is "the only **free** satisfaction" (§5, 5:210). His argument for this claim, as we have seen, rests on the untenable idea that the satisfaction in the agreeable is grounded on an interest. Nonetheless, one can detect in his words the makings of a different line of reasoning:

Berger quotes and discusses the passage in which Kant says this (68), he does not address this obvious difficulty.

One can say that among all these three kinds of satisfaction only that of the taste for the beautiful is a disinterested and **free** satisfaction; for no interest, neither that of the senses nor that of reason, extorts approval. ... An object of inclination and one that is imposed upon us by a law of reason for the sake of desire leave us no freedom to make anything into an object of pleasure ourselves. All interest presupposes a need or produces one; and as a determining ground of approval it no longer leaves the judgment on the object free. (§5, 5:210)

Kant asserts here that the point of difference between favor and the other kinds of satisfaction is that it is something that we freely give while they are compelled (“extorted”) from us.¹⁰ To be sure, he says specifically that they are compelled *by interests*. But his basic thought need not be put in those terms: he need only say that the satisfaction in the good is compelled by practical reason and the satisfaction in the agreeable by empirical sensibility, while favor is not compelled by either of these. That favor is not compelled by practical reason follows from the opening thesis of the exposition, according to which “the judgment of taste is aesthetic” (§1, 5:203): practical reason can only work through concepts, and the judgment of taste is, according to that thesis, not determined by any concept. That favor is not compelled by sensation is implicit in the argument that Kant gives for the thesis that favor is not determined by interest, in §2. He says there: “It is readily seen that to say that [an object] is **beautiful** and to prove that I have taste what matters is what I make of this representation in myself, not how I depend on the existence of the object” (5:205). By this “dependence on the existence of the object” Kant presumably means, as in §3, a relation of the judging subject to the object whereby he or she receives sensations from it. The fact that favor does not depend on this relation while gratification inherently does so is enough to distinguish the two essentially.

To be sure, this argument is not without its weak points. One objection that may be made to it is that, even if Kant can establish that favor is compelled neither by practical reason nor by empirical sensibility, it does not follow that it is “free,” because it may be subject to other determinants. In-

¹⁰ Kant’s verb is *abzwingen*.

deed, one may doubt whether the idea of a “free” satisfaction even makes sense. Kant says that the person making a judgment of taste “feels himself completely **free** with regard to the satisfaction that he devotes to the object” (§5, 5:211). As a point of phenomenology, it is to be doubted whether the person making a judgment of taste feels anything of the sort. And as a point of metaphysics, Kant by his own philosophical standards cannot have proved that this satisfaction is free until he has given a positive account of how it originates: proving freedom in the negative sense of an absence of external causal determination requires proving it in the positive sense of establishing that it has an internal self-determination, or autonomy.¹¹

These objections are telling, but not, I think, damning. For Kant does eventually account for the origin of favor when he attributes it to the free harmony of the imagination and the understanding in §9. Further, it becomes apparent at that point that what Kant takes to be free in the judgment of taste is not, properly speaking, the feeling as such but rather the act of judging and the attendant play of the cognitive faculties. Indeed, one might find a hint of this view in the passage previously quoted from §5, in which Kant says that “all interest ... no longer leaves the judgment [n.b] on the object free” (5:210). The play of the cognitive faculties is free not merely in the epistemological respect of being unconstrained by a concept, but in the metaphysical one of arising from the spontaneity of the subject.¹²

Kant’s argument that favor is determined neither by empirical sensibility nor by practical reason does not prove these conclusions; but it prepares the way for them by ruling out the possibility of attributing favor to either of those two sources. Disentangled from the concept of interest, this argument remains the most defensible part of Kant’s exposition of

¹¹ See *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4:446–7.

¹² In the “Introduction,” Kant speaks of “the spontaneity in the play of the faculties of cognition, the agreement of which contains the ground of this pleasure [viz., the pleasure of taste]” (sec. IX, 5:197). A full explanation of the respect in which the act of judging is “free” would have to show that its causality is governed by a law originating in the power of judgment itself. This law would be the principle of subjective purposiveness that Kant expounds in the “Introduction.”

the first moment of the judgment of taste.¹³

¹³ I thank Keren Gorodeisky for comments on a draft of this paper.