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*Kant on Beauty and Cognition*¹
Alix Cohen (University of Edinburgh)

Kant often seems to suggest that a cognition – whether an everyday cognition or a scientific cognition – cannot be beautiful. In the *Critique of Judgment* and the *Lectures on Logic*, he writes: ‘a science which, as such, is supposed to be beautiful, is absurd.’ (CJ 184 [5:305]) ‘The expression [,] beautiful cognition [,] is not fitting at all’ (LL 446 [24:708]).² These claims are usually understood rather straightforwardly. On the one hand, cognition cannot be beautiful since on Kant’s account, it is all about concepts whilst beauty is defined by its non-conceptual nature. On the other hand, beauty cannot contribute to cognition since the former is grounded on subjective feelings whilst cognition is all about objective knowledge.³ However, I will argue that Kant’s view of the relationship between cognition and beauty is not as straightforward as it may seem, and that both of these claims are in fact false. As I will show, cognition can be beautiful, and the feeling of beauty is cognitively valuable. Yet it is not because beauty is a sign of the truthfulness of a theory. Nor is it because the process that gives rise to the feeling of beauty, the free play, furthers scientific progress. Rather, it is because the experience of beauty stimulates our cognitive powers and thereby enhances our cognitive activity. On this basis, contrary to what is usually thought, cognition can, and in fact should, be beautiful for Kant.

To support this claim, I begin by arguing that if science cannot be beautiful, it is not because science involves the application of concepts. Insofar as, on my account, the same object can be apprehended both cognitively and aesthetically without contradiction, we have no reason to doubt the possibility of an aesthetic dimension of cognition: cognition can be beautiful, although it is not necessarily so. Yet it could be that this dimension is irrelevant to cognition itself. Thus the question is whether its beauty can be relevant to, and even useful for, our cognitive endeavors. In the second section, I examine the main challenge to the idea of an epistemic contribution of beauty to cognition. According to rationalist interpretations of Kant’s account of cognition, feelings are at best irrelevant and at worst a hindrance to our cognitive endeavours, which suggests that for Kant beauty cannot contribute to cognition. The third section discusses an attempt to circumvent this challenge by arguing for the role of beauty in cognition on the basis of the epistemic contribution of aesthetic reflection. However, I go on to suggest that the distinction between aesthetic and cognitive reflection rules out this possibility. Since the rational model of cognition entails that we are unable to argue for the role of beauty in cognition on the basis of the epistemic function of the feeling of aesthetic pleasure, it seems that Kant’s account precludes the idea of an epistemic contribution of beauty all together. However, section four argues that Kant doesn’t hold such an account. To support this claim, I turn to his account of the aesthetic dimension of cognition, which encompasses the different kinds of effects cognition has on the

¹ As the following works by Kant are cited frequently, I have used the following abbreviations throughout the paper: LL (*Lectures on Logic*), CJ (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*), CPR (*Critique of Pure Reason*). The reference is to the Akademie edition of Kant’s works, using the translations from the Cambridge Edition of Kant’s Works (Cambridge University Press).

² See also ‘There is neither a science of the beautiful, only a critique, nor beautiful science, only beautiful art.’ (CJ 184 [5:304]) ‘No judgment at all can be made, however, concerning a beautiful cognition.’ (LL 37 [24:51]) ‘No science can be beautiful’ (LL 270 [24:811]). In this paper, I will not tackle the issue of the possibility of a science of the beautiful.

³ See for instance Rueger (1997), Koriako (1999), Wenzel (2001).

faculty of feeling, and show that the beauty of a cognition is epistemically valuable. In this sense, far from portraying cognition as opposed to beauty, we should acknowledge that the aesthetic dimension of cognition has a rightful place in Kant's epistemic framework.

1. The possibility of a beautiful cognition

Famously for Kant, the feeling of aesthetic pleasure that defines judgments of beauty involves what he calls the harmonious free play of imagination and understanding.

[T]he state of mind in this representation must be that of a feeling of the free play of the powers of representation in a given representation for a cognition in general. ... this merely subjective (aesthetic) judging of the object, or of the representation through which the object is given, precedes the pleasure in it, and is the ground of this pleasure in the harmony of the faculties of cognition (CJ 102-3 [5:217-8]).

This statement has generated on-going debates in the literature, but for the purpose of this paper, I want to focus on the notion of harmonious free play.

Many commentators work under the assumption that for Kant, harmony and free play are so intrinsically connected that any interplay that is free is harmonious and vice-versa. This claim generally leads them to adopt one of two views: either all cognitions are beautiful, or no cognition can be beautiful. According to the former, any object, insofar as it is cognised, is beautiful because it generates a harmonious interplay of our faculties. Since cognizing necessarily involves such harmony, nothing can be either aesthetically indifferent or ugly.⁴ According to the latter, no cognition can be beautiful because it involves determinate concepts and thus inhibits the free play of the faculties, while judgments of beauty are non-conceptual and involve the free play of the faculties. In other words, there is no beauty in cognition, since there is no room for it: cognition is determined by concepts throughout.⁵ Both views are problematic in their own right, but I believe they are wrong for the same reason: they share the assumption that harmony and free play are intrinsically connected. By contrast, I will argue that we should distinguish between them because not all cases of harmony are cases of free play and not all cases of free play are cases of harmony. On this basis, I will formulate an account according to which cognition can be but isn't necessarily beautiful.

Let's begin by focusing on the contrast between judgments of beauty and cognitive judgments. On Kant's account, cognition and aesthetic experience engage the same faculties, imagination and understanding, 'so far as they agree with each other as is requisite for a *cognition in general*' (CJ 103 [5:218]). They interact in a harmonious fashion, although they do so in different ways. In the case of cognition, their harmonious interplay is restrained by the application of concepts since for Kant, knowledge consists in the determinate application of concepts to intuitions schematized by the imagination.⁶ By contrast, aesthetic experience engages the same faculties but in a reflective rather than a determining fashion. In this case, the harmonious interplay between imagination and understanding is free and no concept is applied.

⁴ See for instance Shier (1998) and Wenzel (1999). By contrast with this view, I have argued elsewhere that Kant's account allows for both the aesthetically indifferent and the ugly (Cohen (2013)).

⁵ For instance, Rueger has noted that 'the [aesthetic] pleasure that is characteristic of the free play of our faculties in reflective judgement is not to be found in the exercise of determinative judgement in science.' (Rueger (1997): 315)

⁶ See for instance Kant (1999): 155 [A19/B33].

The powers of cognition that are set into play by this representation [i.e., an artistic representation] are hereby in a free play, since no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition (CJ 102 [5:217]).

Whilst the contrast between judgments of beauty and judgments of cognition seems straightforward enough, it has been interpreted as entailing that no object of cognition – whether everyday cognition or scientific cognition – can be beautiful because it involves concepts and excludes free play, whilst beauty is non-conceptual and involves free play. Now, there is no doubt that the contrast between beauty and cognition is well grounded: for Kant, they differ in meaningful and significant ways. What I will suggest, however, is that this contrast is compatible with the claim that a cognition can be beautiful. For, none of the characteristics of beauty entail that objects of cognition cannot be aesthetically apprehended. This is in fact what Kant alludes to at the very beginning of the *Critique of Judgment*: ‘even if the given representations were to be rational but related in a judgment solely to the subject (its feeling), then they are to that extent always aesthetic.’ (CJ 90 [5:204]) What he suggests here, albeit implicitly, is that the same representation can be related to the subject in a number of ways, and which way obtains is determined by the determining ground of the judgment that ensues: it is a cognitive judgment if it is grounded on a concept, and it is aesthetic if it is grounded on disinterested pleasure. Hence even when we are judging a representation that is fully conceptualised and determined (‘rational’), as long as our judgment is based on disinterested pleasure, it is a judgment of taste.

Readers of Kant have resisted accepting this account of the distinction between cognitive and aesthetic judgments because instead of emphasising what distinguishes them from each other (namely, their grounds), they focus on what they have in common (namely, the faculties they engage). On their picture, the same faculties (i.e., imagination and understanding) being at play in both operations of the mind (i.e., cognitive and aesthetic judgment), their harmonious interplay can only be of one kind “at any given time”⁷ (i.e., it can only be either free or unfree). The nature of cognition thus precludes the aesthetic engagement with its objects.⁸ However, not only does Kant’s account of cognition give us no reason to accept this picture, it gives us good reasons to deny it. For the same faculties can be in unfree harmony in one respect (cognitive, determining judgment) and in free harmony in another (aesthetic, reflective judgment).

To make sense of this claim, let’s begin with the well-known example of a rose. While I judge it aesthetically, I am nevertheless aware of the fact that it is a rose, even if I do not pay attention to this fact. As Kant notes,

Flowers are free natural beauties. Hardly anyone other than the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is supposed to be; and even the botanist, who recognizes in it the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end if he judges the flower by means of taste. (CJ 114 [5:229])

I have successfully applied the concept of rose, through determining judgment, to the given of intuition, and in this respect, the imagination and the understanding function

⁷ Of course, the expression “at any given time” is infelicitous since our faculties are not meant to operate in time. But it is a figure of speech, as should be clear from the context of the discussion.

⁸ For instance, as Rueger notes, ‘Science aims at the general under which the particular can be subsumed; only when this aim has been reached can we speak of science in the proper sense. For Kant, the title of a science could not be given to an activity—the aesthetic experience—that involves an unending vacillation between the particular and the general where the general is never found to adequately subsume the particular.’ (Rueger (1997): 315)

in unfree harmony.⁹ But this unfree cognitive harmony can obtain while the imagination and understanding are also in harmonious free play, in aesthetic judgment. In other words, in the experience of the rose, I experience simultaneously cognitive harmony and aesthetic harmony between imagination and understanding, although they differ insofar as in the former a concept is applied (cognitive unfree harmony) whilst in the latter no concept is applied (aesthetic free harmony). What these experiences have in common, however, is that they are both pleasurable, although the kind of pleasure they give rise to differs: aesthetic pleasure is disinterested whereas cognitive pleasure is not. It is the result of the attainment of our cognitive aim.

This determination [determining judgment] is an end with regard to cognition; and in relation to this it is also always connected with satisfaction (which accompanies the accomplishment of any aim, even a merely problematic one). But then it is merely the approval of the solution that answers a problem, and not a free and indeterminately purposive entertainment of the mental powers with that which we call beautiful, where the understanding is in the service of the imagination and not vice versa. (CJ 125-6 [5:242])¹⁰

While determinative cognition gives rise to cognitive pleasure, aesthetic pleasure is sustainably on-going in its freedom insofar as the reflective process it consists in is itself pleasurable because harmonious. However, contrary to what is often thought, not all reflective processes are either harmonious, pleasurable or free.¹¹

To make sense of this claim, let's go back to the example of a rose. Upon encountering a new species of rose, I "determinately" apply the empirical concept of "rose", whilst "reflectively" looking for a concept, distinct from that of "rose", which I do have, that would better fit the object. In determining judgment, the interplay between imagination and understanding consists in the application of the concept of rose, through determining judgment, to the given of intuition. Cognitive faculties are in harmony, but an unfree one – what Kant sometimes calls the 'lawful agreement' between the powers of cognition (CJ 175 [5:295]). In reflective cognitive judgment, the interplay between imagination and understanding is not unfree in the same way since no concept is applied and no cognition achieved. But it is not free either, since in this case, reflective judgment nevertheless operates 'in relation to a concept thereby made possible' (CJ 15 [20:210]). Cognitive reflection is constrained by the fact that it is conceptually steered: it aims at the determinate application of a concept although it fails to achieve it. We could say that it is reflectively objectively purposive, by contrast with the determinate objective purposiveness of cognition as well as the reflective subjective purposiveness of aesthetic reflection, which is 'a free and indeterminately purposive entertainment of the mental powers' (CJ 126 [5:242]). Cognitive reflection is not harmonious until it stabilises itself in its determinative form. Imagination and understanding are in disharmony, or at least not in harmony, and no pleasure arises from their reflective interplay. On this basis, insofar as they consist in different mental processes, we need to distinguish between the cognitive and the aesthetic use of reflective judgment: the former is neither free nor harmonious and, because not harmonious, not pleasurable, whilst the latter is free and harmonious, and because

⁹ See for instance CJ 175 [5:295].

¹⁰ See also 'The attainment of every aim is combined with the feeling of pleasure' (CJ 73 [5:187]). For a discussion of Kant's claim that this pleasure goes unnoticed, see Merritt (2014).

¹¹ Allison puts forward a gradual model according to which there can be more or less harmony between the cognitive faculties rather than different kinds of harmony (Allison (2001): 117). On Guyer's interpretation, aesthetic harmony is 'an *excess* of felt unity or harmony' (Guyer (2005): 149). By contrast on my reading, cognitive and aesthetic harmony differ in kind.

harmonious, pleasurable.¹²

However, one may object that judgments of beauty and of cognition shouldn't be so different that the aesthetic free play loses its connection to cognition.¹³ Otherwise, the universal validity of judgments of taste cannot be accounted for.¹⁴ It is true that on my reading, cognition and beauty do consist in different mental processes so that the latter is not required for the possibility of the former. But recall that for Kant, what 'is requisite for a *cognition in general*' is that 'they [imagination and understanding] agree with each other' (CJ 103 [5:218]) – which I interpret as the requirement that beauty and cognition both engage the same faculties *in a harmonious fashion*.¹⁵ That they harmonize with each other in different ways (freely for beauty and unfreely for cognition) is irrelevant since on my account, it is the harmony that is the ground of the universal validity of both judgments of taste and judgments of cognition. Aesthetic pleasure still arises from our fundamental shared cognitive powers functioning harmoniously 'rather than from merely idiosyncratic associations' as Guyer puts it (Guyer (2006): 315). While it doesn't guarantee that every creature endowed with these capacities will feel aesthetic pleasure, it does secure the claim that they have the capacity for it, and thus that 'the pleasure ... can rightly be expected of everyone' (CJ 170 [5:290]).

As a result, there is no reason to believe that the harmony required by cognition is necessarily of the same kind as the harmony entailed by the experience of the beautiful, and thus that all cognitions are beautiful. Nor is there reason to believe that the unfree play required by cognition rules out the free play required by the experience of the beautiful, such that cognition and the experience of beauty are incompatible. On the contrary, they involve different but compatible and potentially concurrent mental processes or functions – summarized below in table 1. On this basis, we are left with no reason to doubt the possibility of an aesthetic dimension of cognition: cognition can be beautiful, although it is not necessarily so.¹⁶ Of course, it could be that this

¹² For an account of the relationship between harmony and pleasure, see Cohen (forthcoming).

¹³ Ginsborg has the best formulation of the worry: 'if we regard the relation of the faculties in their free play as unique to aesthetic experience, it seems that Kant has no right to argue from the universal validity of empirical cognition to the universal validity of pleasure. For, [...] the free play of the faculties no longer appears to manifest a condition required for cognition.' (Ginsborg (2015): 54) I would like to thank Angela Breitenbach and Yoon Choi for pressing this challenge.

¹⁴ See CJ 124-5 [5:240-1].

¹⁵ Pluhar's translation is even clearer on this point: 'this subjective universal communicability can be nothing but that of the mental state in which we are when imagination and understanding are in free play (insofar as they harmonize with each other as required for *cognition in general*)' (CJ 62 [5:218]). For contrasting interpretations of this passage, see for instance Guyer (1997): 85-6 and Ginsborg (2015): 92-3. However, my interpretation concurs with Ginsborg's conclusion that no free play is required for any act of cognition.

¹⁶ One may object that some cognitions, and scientific ones in particular, differ from roses insofar as the latter are sensible objects whereas the former are not. This would suggest that abstract scientific cognitions pose a particular problem for an account of the possibility of beautiful cognition. However, an implication of my account is that not only can we find scientific objects beautiful while we cognize them, we can also find scientific *cognitions* beautiful. For a cognition to be judged beautiful, all that is necessary is that the judgment needs to be neither grounded on concepts nor aimed at concepts but rather grounded on the subject's feeling of disinterested pleasure. As long as judgment operates in relation to the faculty of pleasure, it is aesthetic, and remains so even if the representation that is apprehended is fully conceptualised and determined, as Kant hints at in CJ 90 [5:204]. Thus irrespective of the type of representation we are faced with, as long as our judgment is based on disinterested pleasure, it is a judgment of taste. The only relevant factor is what is 'abstracted from [the concept] in his judgment' (CJ 115 [5:231]). Unfortunately, it goes beyond the remit of this chapter to defend this claim further. For discussions of the particular case of mathematical objects, see Breitenbach (2013) and Wenzel (2001).

dimension is irrelevant to cognition itself. Thus the next question to address is whether its beauty can be relevant to, and even useful for, our cognitive endeavors. As I will show in the next section, there is a serious challenge to the idea of an epistemic contribution of beauty to cognition; namely, we have good reasons for thinking that for Kant, feelings are at best irrelevant and at worst a hindrance to our cognitive endeavours.

Table 1. Different kinds of judgments

<i>Interplay of the faculties</i>	<i>Free (conceptually undetermined; subjective)</i>	<i>Unfree (conceptually determined; objective)</i>
<i>Harmonious (accompanied by feeling of pleasure)</i>	Beauty	Determining cognition
<i>Disharmonious (accompanied by feeling of displeasure)</i>	Ugliness	Reflective cognition

2. A challenge to the idea of an epistemic contribution of beauty to cognition: Kant's rationalist model of cognition

Although little attention has been paid in the literature to the question of the role of feelings in Kant's account of cognition, it is usually assumed that for Kant, they do not play a role in the acquisition of knowledge; or that if they do play a role in it, they can only be a hindrance rather than a help. If this assumption is correct, it would seem to entail that feelings of beauty, *qua* feelings, are necessarily irrelevant to cognition if not hindrances to it.

The presumption that Kant holds a rationalist conception of cognition is based on the fact that he defines feelings in terms that seem at odds with the very nature of cognition: they are subjective and contingent affective states whilst cognition consists in objective and necessary judgments. The few commentators who do mention this issue simply conclude that for Kant, emotions distort cognition since they are illnesses of the mind.¹⁷ On this basis, Kant's view of the relationship between feelings and cognition has been interpreted along the lines of what McAllister has called the 'rational model of science' – a model according to which feelings are irrelevant to our epistemic inquiries.¹⁸ The acquisition of knowledge is a theoretical enterprise that, as such, only necessitates the intervention of cognitive faculties (i.e., theoretical reason, the understanding, sensibility, the imagination and judgment): feelings 'contribute nothing to the play of our representations as powers of cognition (LL 270 [24:811]).¹⁹ They do

For an account that focuses on scientific representations in general, see Breitenbach (forthcoming). For a compelling attempt to show that Kant's philosophy has the resources to deal with cases of beautiful mathematics in spite of the fact that he himself may not have seen it, see Wenzel (2013).

¹⁷ For instance, 'In most discussions of the relations between emotion and cognition, the emphasis has been on the assumption that the former distorts the latter. For Kant, emotion was an illness of the mind.' (Frijda, Mastead and Bem (2000): 2)

¹⁸ See McAllister (1996): 9ff.

¹⁹ 'Representations can also be related to something other than cognition, namely, to the feeling of pleasure and displeasure (the way in which we are affected by things).' (LL 440 [24:701]) 'Feelings can

not have any cognitive import since they merely yield subjective certainty: ‘frequently we take something to be certain merely because it pleases us [...] This certainty or uncertainty is not objective, however, but instead subjective. (LL 157 [24:198]) Therefore, feelings do not have any epistemic relevance. If they do intervene in our epistemic pursuits, they have ‘dangerous consequences’ for cognition (LL 129 [24:163]). I believe these consequences are of two types, what I would like to call obstruction and intrusion, and it is important to distinguish between them.

The first type of dangerous consequence is obstruction. Feelings impede upon cognitive faculties and processes, making them less efficient and reliable. They hinder cognition by preventing our faculties from functioning properly: ‘Everything that stimulates and excites us serves to disadvantage our power of judgment.’ (LL 44 [24:60]) They distort our cognitive processes and the acquisition of knowledge: ‘stimulation and excitement, most of all, can spoil the logical perfection in our cognitions and judgments’ (LL 547-8 [9:37]).²⁰ The second type of dangerous consequence is intrusion. Rather than merely impeding cognition, feelings intrude in it by introducing a subjective dimension into what should be wholly objective.²¹ They prompt us to adopt beliefs on subjective rather than objective grounds, for instance because they suit our taste.

No aesthetic proof can be a demonstration, then, for an aesthetic probation arises merely out of the agreement of cognitions with our feeling and our taste[;] thus it is nothing but persuasion. (LL 186 [24:234])²²

When feelings intrude upon cognition, we introduce a private dimension that does not belong to the realm of knowledge, thereby leading to cognitive bias, distortion, partiality, etc.²³ Feelings are thus ‘foreign powers’ that bring non-epistemic concerns to bear onto epistemic ones.

[W]hen foreign powers mingle with the correct laws of the understanding, a mixed effect arises, and error arises from the conflict of [this with] our judgments based on the laws of the understanding and of reason. (LL 79 [24:102])

Feelings should neither obstruct nor intrude upon cognition, which seems to entail that Kant holds a rationalist account of cognition according to which all feelings, including aesthetic ones, are at best irrelevant and at worst a hindrance to our cognitive endeavours. However, the next section, rather than concluding that beauty cannot contribute to cognition, examines an attempt to circumvent this challenge by arguing for the role of beauty in cognition on the basis of the epistemic contribution of aesthetic

never produce a cognition.’ (LL 466 [24:730]) ‘Through sensation, good feeling, pain - one does not cognize an object.’ (LL 348 [24:904])

²⁰ ‘Through these we are transposed into a condition most unsuitable for judging.’ (LL 297 [24:842])

²¹ We could draw an analogy between these dangerous consequences and the way in which children can interfere with adult conversation. They can make a lot of noise, which makes the conversation difficult to follow for the adults, putting some of them in a bad mood and thereby making the conversation less pleasant for them, or taking their attention away from the conversation (first type of damage: obstruction model). Or they can intervene in the conversation, expressing an opinion, raising concerns, etc. (second type of damage: intrusion model).

²² See also LL 157 [24:198] and 125 [24:158].

²³ This is what Kant calls ‘prejudice’: ‘The principal sources of prejudices are subjective causes, accordingly, which are falsely held to be objective grounds.’ (LL 315-6 [24:864-5]) A prejudice is a feeling that has been turned into an epistemic principle and thereby illegitimately plays the role of cognitive ground, when the only legitimate epistemic principles stem from our cognitive faculties. This is why, for Kant, the cause of error cannot be found in the understanding itself: ‘the understanding taken alone cannot possibly err.’ (LL 64 [24:84])

reflection.

3. The epistemic function of aesthetic reflection

A number of commentators have suggested that cognitive and aesthetic judgments are mutually reinforcing precisely because they involve the same kind of reflective free play between imagination and understanding. The overlap and the epistemically relevant continuity between aesthetics and cognition resides in the fact that they both engage reflective judgment in an attempt to “make sense” – in the form of either aesthetic interpretation or cognitive reflection.²⁴ Aesthetic contemplation is a reflection upon the various meanings of a representation, an attempt to make sense of it by trying out different interpretations, different ways of looking at it. This appears most clearly in what Guyer calls ‘multicognitive’ interpretations of the free play as involving ‘a multitude of concepts playfully applied to [a representation]’, or ‘occasioning [the understanding] to entertain fresh conceptual possibilities, while, conversely, the imagination, under the general direction of the understanding, strives to conceive new patterns of order’.²⁵ The imaginative exercise of the free play allows us to gain different insights into the object, and thereby beauty contributes directly to cognition.

While this interpretation is suggestive, it is based on the claim that cognitive and aesthetic reflective judgments involve the same free play between imagination and understanding – or at least that they are similar enough that they overlap in useful ways so that one can contribute to the other. Yet on my interpretation, they can’t contribute to each other in the way that this interpretation suggests, since they consist in different mental processes. As I argued in section 1, cognitive reflection is neither free nor harmonious while aesthetic reflection is both free and harmonious.²⁶ Thus if beauty is to contribute to cognition in any way, it cannot be on the basis of the epistemic contribution of aesthetic reflection.

Since the rational model of cognition entails that aesthetic pleasure cannot have any cognitive function, it seems that Kant’s account simply rules out the idea of an epistemic contribution of beauty. However, the aim of the next section is to argue that it doesn’t. As I will show, first, contrary to the rational model of cognition, feelings don’t always obstruct or intrude upon cognition, they sometimes enhance it. Second and more importantly for my purposes, feelings of beauty never obstruct or intrude upon cognition; rather, they always boost it. To support these claims, I turn to Kant’s account of the aesthetic dimension of cognition, which encompasses the different kinds of effects cognition has on the faculty of feeling.

²⁴ See in particular Wenzel (2013), esp. 63, 67, Breitenbach (2013), esp. 90-3 and (2015), esp. 11-5, and for a more contemporary formulation of this point, Elgin (2002). On Breitenbach’s account, the beauty of mathematics resides in the spontaneous activity of our conceptual and imaginative capacities. While her account is focused on the particular case of mathematical knowledge, I believe that it can be extended to scientific cognition and objects in general.

²⁵ Respectively in Guyer (2006): 166, Seel (1988): 344-9, and Allison (2001): 171. On Guyer’s account for instance, ‘a beautiful object suggests an indeterminate or open-ended manifold of concepts for the manifold of intuition, allowing the mind to flip back and forth playfully and enjoyably among different ways of conceiving the same object without allowing or requiring it to settle down on one determinate way of conceiving the object. [...] the free play is precisely among a multiplicity of possible concepts and hence cognitions suggested by the beautiful object’ (Guyer (2006): 166).

²⁶ Keren Gorodeisky has explored another way of distinguishing between beauty and cognition. As she has noted, ‘the patterns of order apprehended and exhibited by the imagination in judgments of taste differ in kind from those apprehended and exhibited in cognitive judgments’ (Gorodeisky (2011): 420). I believe that our accounts are compatible but focus on different aspects of Kant’s account – I focus on its affective dimension while she focuses on its imaginative dimension.

4. The aesthetic dimension of cognition

Our nature as knowers entails that our cognitive activity, and the cognitions that result from this activity, ‘affects our feeling (by means of pleasure or displeasure)’ (LL 34 [24:48]), and these effects are part of our cognitive life – they belong to what Kant calls the ‘aesthetic perfection of cognition’. Unfortunately, he doesn’t present a unified account of it, so some reconstructive work is called for.

Throughout the *Lectures on Logic*, Kant describes aesthetic cognition in a number of ways. An aesthetically successful cognition pleases the senses; it provides ‘insight’; it agrees with ‘our feeling and our taste’; it ‘excites, delights and flatters our feeling’. It can be stimulating, attractive, exciting, lively. Aesthetic perfection is defined as ‘new, easy, lively’, resting on ‘agreement with the subject’ and ‘the particular laws of human sensibility’. What is particularly relevant to the purpose of this section is that aesthetic cognition encompasses a variety of feelings of pleasure, including aesthetic feelings: it involves ‘real, independent beauty’, ‘the essentially beautiful’ as well as merely agreeable feelings – what Kant calls the ‘pleasant’.²⁷

Through this agreement with the universal laws of sensibility *the really, independently beautiful*, whose essence consists in *mere form*, is distinguished in kind from the *pleasant*, which pleases merely in sensation through stimulation or excitement, and which on this account can only be the ground of a merely private pleasure. (LL 547 [9:36-7])

To make sense of the contribution of feelings of beauty to cognition, it is essential to distinguish it from the contribution of pleasant feelings to cognition. Kant’s lecture notes state that the pleasant belongs to the matter of sensibility. It pleases the senses in sensation, and can spoil logical perfection. By contrast, the essentially beautiful belongs to the form of sensibility. It consists in the agreement of a cognition with the laws of intuition, and combines best with logical perfection. The former is stimulating and exciting whilst the latter is ‘the object of a universal pleasure’ (LL 547 [9:37]).²⁸ Let me examine them in turn in order to identify and spell out the distinctive features of the beautiful dimension of the aesthetic perfection of cognition.

Pleasant feelings may be conducive to the success of cognition in some cases. First, they can help detect salient features of the object and thereby facilitate the picking out of certain features or patterns that we may not have detected at the logical or the conceptual level alone and that may be epistemically significant (e.g., parts of a scientific image that have a particularly nice color may stand out). Second, they engage our capacity for attention by enlivening our mind and keeping the object in mind: ‘Gentle excitement can give occasion for further reflection, to be sure.’ (LL 267-8 [24:808]) Yet even when pleasant feelings are helpful to cognition, their contribution to it is both extrinsic and contingent. First, they are merely instrumental to the pursuit of our cognitive ends. They are neither necessary nor sufficient for it, and they can even be counterproductive, as already noted in the case of obstruction. For instance, excitement and delight are unreliably helpful: ‘stimulation and excitement, most of all, can spoil the logical perfection in our cognitions and judgments’ (LL 547 [9:37]). Second, we have no epistemic justification for paying more attention to pleasant features than to indifferent or painful ones. As merely private feelings, pleasant feelings

²⁷ Respectively in LL 24 [9:37], 186 [24:234], 39 [9:54], 44 [9:60], 266 [24:806], 547 [9:36-7].

²⁸ See also LL 266-71 [806-12], 443-6 [705-9], 546-8 [36-8].

are not sharable and thus intrude upon cognition if used as subjective grounds for it.²⁹ Therefore, pleasant feelings are not reliably advantageous to cognition and in particular its logical perfection. They always retain the potential to obstruct it and intrude on it.³⁰

By contrast, Kant believes that ‘aesthetic perfection in regard to the essentially beautiful can ... be advantageous to logical perfection.’ (LL 547 [9:37]) To make sense of this claim, note that he repeatedly talks about beauty as ‘the feeling ... which animates the cognitive faculties’ and it ‘indirectly ... serve[s] cognition too’ (CJ 194 [5:316]; translation modified).³¹ Through the notions of animation, quickening and enlivening, he puts forward the idea that the stimulation of our cognitive faculties is conducive to their activity. By stimulating our cognitive faculties, experiences of beauty in general enhance our cognitive activity and are thus advantageous to cognition. But more importantly for my purposes, experiencing a particular cognition as beautiful is good for my cognition of it. This is due to the fact that there is an intrinsic connection between the feeling of beauty and the efficiency of my cognitive activity. The experience of a cognition as beautiful stimulates the activity of imagination and understanding, and thus our cognitive activity, as it occurs. For as argued in section 1, cognitive and aesthetic activity can take place concomitantly as I experience a beautiful cognition. In this sense, the feeling of beauty is a cognitive booster. By making us more efficient cognisers, it contributes indirectly to the logical perfection of a cognition.

Note, however, that the epistemic advantage afforded by the feeling of beauty only contributes to cognition indirectly, for it does so irrespective of whether the cognition is true or not. The intrinsic connection between beauty and cognition is not between beauty and epistemic credence or beauty and truth but rather between beauty and the activity of the cognitive faculties. The effect of the feeling of aesthetic pleasure is on the activity of cognizing rather than on the content of cognition. Beauty is a reliable sign of cognitive efficacy only because it enhances cognitive activity as it

²⁹ ‘such a pleasure would be none other than mere agreeableness in sensation, and hence by its very nature could have only private validity, since it would immediately depend on the representation through which the object *is given*.’ (CJ 102 [5:217]) By contrast, objective grounds ‘are independent of the nature and interest of the subject’ (LL 574 [9:70]). They can be adopted by all, at least in principle: they are ‘valid for the reason of every human being to take it to be true; ... regardless of the difference among the subjects’ (CPR 685 [A820–1/B848–9]).

³⁰ One may worry that on my account, cognitive pleasures, which I defined in section 1 as the pleasures we feel when we cognize, turn out to be a liability for cognition, just as pleasant feelings discussed above do. However, they don’t. For, by contrast with pleasant feelings, cognitive pleasures are the effects of a particular type of interplay between imagination and understanding, namely their unforced harmony. Thus, just as beauty, it is insofar as it is harmonious that cognition is pleasurable. However, by contrast with aesthetic pleasure, which enlivens the activity of the cognitive faculties in a noticeable and ongoing fashion, cognitive pleasures are discreet and barely noticeable since so ubiquitous. Insofar as they are triggered by the attainment of our cognitive aims, their noticeable effects are essentially motivational (i.e., they engage our cognitive interest and thus our drive for further cognitions). I would like to thank Yoon Choi for pressing me to address this worry.

³¹ ‘when the aim is aesthetic, then the imagination is free, so that, over and above that harmony with the concept, it may supply, in an unstudied way, a wealth of undeveloped material for the understanding which the latter disregarded in its concept. But the understanding employs this material not so much objectively, for cognition, as subjectively, namely to *quicken the cognitive powers*, though indirectly *this does serve cognition too*.’ (CJ 185 [5:316–7]; my emphasis) This is Pluhar’s translation. See also CJ 107 [5:222] where Kant talks about beauty’s ‘internal causality (which is purposive) with regard to cognition in general’. This is something Zuckert briefly hints at although she doesn’t account for the way in which the liveliness of our faculties helps us as cognisers (Zuckert (2007): 453). For other occurrences of the notion of animation, see CJ 104 [5:219], 107 [5:222], 122 [5:238], 167 [5:287], 192 [5:313], 193 [5:315], 206 [5:329], 207 [5:331].

occurs. What it tracks is the condition of our cognitive powers, not the truth of cognition itself.

As a result, contrary to the rationalist model of cognition presented in section 2, the feeling of beauty doesn't intrude upon cognition, for it only impacts our cognitive powers rather than cognition itself. Nor does it obstruct cognition, since it only ever enlivens our cognitive faculties. Of course, the beauty of a cognition should not be taken to provide epistemic guidance. Nor should it be used as a means to choose between competing theories. For on my interpretation, beauty is not an indication of insight.³² But whilst it cannot be used to ground epistemic choices, I have shown that it has a legitimate epistemic function.

On this basis, we can now make sense of why Kant repeatedly stresses that 'we must make it our task to provide aesthetic perfection for those cognitions that are in general capable of it, and to make a scholastically correct, logically perfect cognition popular through its aesthetic form.' (LL 548 [37-8]) Human cognition is embodied, and through the demand for the aesthetic perfection of cognition, Kant not only acknowledges this but makes allowances for it: 'Aesthetic perfection consists in the agreement of cognition with the subject and is grounded on the particular sensibility of man.' (LL 547 [9:36]) Of course, the aesthetic perfection of cognition is not necessary for cognition to be successfully pursued. But it certainly makes its pursuit both more enjoyable and more efficient. Since we are imperfect, finite knowers with limited computational powers, we need all the cognitive help we can get, including from our affective capacities. As Kant writes, 'the needs of human nature and the end of popularity in cognition demand, however, that we seek to unite the two perfections [logical and aesthetic] with one another' (LL 548 [9:37]). Although very few cognitions may turn out to be beautiful, what I have shown is that they can, and in fact should, be beautiful.³³

5. Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, a number of passages from Kant's *Lectures on Logic* as well as the third Critique suggest that for Kant, cognition cannot be beautiful.³⁴ What I set out to show is that his view of the relationship between cognition and beauty is not as straightforward as these passages seem to imply, and that we should think of beauty as connected to cognition in a number of important and meaningful ways.

Taking stock of the notion of an aesthetic of cognition as I have interpreted it, I believe that it is an important addition to traditional ways of interpreting Kant. Kantian cognition is often characterised as 'impoverished', reduced to 'the acts of conceptual subsumption', as the mere conceptualisation of particulars, with a 'sharp divide between the aesthetic and the cognitive' (Pillow (2006): 246, 248, 254). Longuenesse,

³² Contrast with Breitenbach's claims that 'beauty can provide a heuristic means for choosing between theories, even though there is no intrinsic connection between beauty and truth' and that 'Aesthetic considerations may therefore provide an initial, even if not determining, indicative guide in our search for understanding of the phenomena' (Breitenbach (2013): 94, 96). I would like to thank her for helping me pinpoint where our disagreement lays.

³³ As Kant notes, 'History, geography, reading the ancients, which unite both perfections, anthropology [too], must be our instructors and must make the spirit more alert.' (LL 270 [24:811]) 'There always remains a kind of conflict between the aesthetic and the logical perfection of our cognition, which cannot be fully removed.' (LL 547-8 [9:37])

³⁴ See footnote 2.

for instance, talks of the divide between the cognitive work of determinative understanding and the merely reflective play of aesthetic experience (Longuenesse (1998): 164). By contrast with this picture, the line I have defended here suggests a broader, and potentially richer, conception of cognition, a conception that brings together a wide array of cognitive processes that goes well beyond the mere determinative work of the understanding to include our affective capacities. Thereby, Kant demonstrates that his account of cognition is far from portraying human beings as disembodied pure minds.³⁵

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³⁵ Contrast with 'in the veins of the knowing subject, such as . . . Kant [has] construed him, flows not real blood but rather the thinned fluid of reason as pure thought activity.' (Dilthey (1922): viii) For an account of other features that are due to human being's embodied cognition, see Cohen (2014).

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