AESTHETIC DISINTERESTEDNESS IN KANT AND SCHOPENHAUER

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While several commentators agree that Schopenhauer's theory of 'will-less contemplation' is a variant of Kant's account of aesthetic disinterestedness, I shall argue here that Schopenhauer's account departs from Kant's in several important ways, and that he radically transforms Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgement into a novel aesthetic attitude theory. In the first part of the article, I critically discuss Kant's theory of disinterestedness, pay particular attention to rectifying a common misconception of this notion, and discuss some significant problems with Kant's approach. In part two, I argue that Schopenhauer gives up Kant's concern with the transcendental conditions of the reflecting judgement, but nonetheless retains two crucial aspects of Kant's analysis: first, the idea that pure aesthetic pleasure cannot be based on the satisfaction of some personal desire or inclination and, second, that aesthetic experience is ultimately based on the stimulation of our cognitive powers. For Kant, too, suggests that, although our application of the predicate 'beautiful' be independent of the subsumption of the object under any determinate concept, it still leaves room for the imagination and the understanding to play 'beyond' what is regulated by determinate concepts. For Schopenhauer, aesthetic pleasure is equally the result of the cognitive freedom and expansion that the 'will-less' attitude affords. Schopenhauer thus transforms the Kantian transcendental analysis of beauty in terms of 'non-conceptual *reflection*' into a psychological theory of beauty in terms of 'non-conceptual *cognition*'. Hence, according to both Kant and Schopenhauer (or so I argue) a beautiful object yields a degree of harmony that cannot be reduced to the discursively rigid unity offered by conceptual knowledge. And, although Schopenhauer's 'idealistic' version of aesthetic perception fails to accommodate for several valuable ways in which artworks can convey ideas, thoughts, and emotions, his account of aesthetic contemplation in terms of 'will-lessness' and objectivity is still rich in psychological insight.

In his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Friedrich Nietzsche deplores that 'Schopenhauer made use of the Kantian version of the aesthetic problem', and 'could not break free of the spell of Kant's definition' of beauty as disinterested pleasure.[1] However, even though Nietzsche rightly emphasizes that Schopenhauer will incorporate Kant's notion of disinterestedness into his own aesthetic theory, Schopenhauer also fundamentally transforms Kant's 'Analytic of the Beautiful' into a highly original aesthetic attitude theory[2] and focuses on the cognitive and ethical values

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 78–79.

[2] Schopenhauer may well have been the first to hold that disinterestedness is a defining quality of the aesthetic attitude. Although Kant has often been interpreted to defend such a view, he nowhere claims that disinterestedness is essential to the aesthetic attitude but (as we shall see) that it is a requirement of the pleasure on which a pure aesthetic judgement is based. Nor do British philosophers such as Lord Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Alison defend a disinterested attitude view of beauty and taste. Their

of aesthetic *perception* instead of on the logic of aesthetic *judgement*. Schopenhauer holds that the purely disinterested, objective stance is inextricably connected with knowledge of, what he calls, Platonic Ideas and is hence cognitively valuable. This heightened state of awareness is pleasurable not only because it frees us from the thraldom of the will, but also because it yields genuine cognition of 'the purely objective inner nature of things, namely the *Ideas* appearing in them'.[3]

In the first part of the article, I critically discuss Kant's theory of disinterestedness. I pay particular attention to rectifying a common misconception of this notion, and discuss some significant problems with Kant's usage of the criterion of disinterestedness to distinguish between the beautiful and the agreeable.

In part two, then, I argue that Schopenhauer (i) transforms Kant's logical analysis of aesthetic judgement into a novel psychological account of aesthetic contemplation, (ii) gives up Kant's concern with the transcendental conditions of the reflecting judgement, and (iii) focuses on a peculiar, 'will-less' mode of attention to objects. It will be argued that Schopenhauer nonetheless retains two crucial aspects of Kant's analysis of beauty: first, the idea that the pleasure of beauty cannot be based on the satisfaction of some personal desire or inclination and, second, that aesthetic experience is ultimately based on the stimulation of our cognitive powers, that is, what Schopenhauer calls the 'intellect'. For Kant, too, suggests that, although our application of the predicate 'beautiful' should be independent of the subsumption of the object under any determinate concept (a requirement, moreover, with which Schopenhauer concurs) it still leaves room for the imagination and the understanding to play 'beyond' what is regulated by determinate concepts. On Schopenhauer's account, aesthetic pleasure is equally the result of the cognitive freedom and expansion that the will-less attitude affords. Schopenhauer thus transforms the Kantian transcendental analysis of beauty in

work contains no reference to 'disinterested attention', 'disinterested contemplation', or 'disinterested perception'. See Miles Rind, 'The Concept of Disinterestedness in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40 (2002): 67–87. To hold that disinterestedness is a defining element of aesthetic perception, as Schopenhauer does, was (as far as I know) entirely new in the history of philosophy.

3 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), 2:369. Hereafter: *WWR*. Schopenhauer also claims that our aesthetic relation to the world also has genuine moral value, for it allows us to exist (at least temporarily) as pure will-less subjects. This is, on Schopenhauer's view, remarkably similar to the moral state of 'complete resignation', in which 'one is then left only as purely knowing being, as the undimmed mirror of the world' (*WWR*, 1:390). Although Kant, of course, never denies that beauty may have cognitive or moral value, the cognitive and moral values Schopenhauer attaches to the contemplation of beauty are obviously very un-Kantian. Aesthetic experience, for both Kant and Schopenhauer, affords a feeling of freedom, for Kant, however, aesthetic freedom of the imagination is a symbol of moral, that is, rational freedom, whereas Schopenhauer suggests that aesthetic consciousness offers freedom from the pressures of the will-to-life.

terms of 'non-conceptual *reflection*' into a psychological theory of beauty in terms of 'non-conceptual *cognition*'. And whereas, for Kant, disinterested pleasure is grounded in the 'free harmonious play' of our cognitive powers but is not itself a form of cognition, on Schopenhauer's view beauty does somehow offer us (non-conceptual) insight and understanding, which adds to the pleasure of the aesthetic experience.

Thus, according to both Kant and Schopenhauer, or so I argue, a beautiful object conveys a *primordial sense of non-conceptual unity and coherence* and yields a degree of harmony that cannot be reduced to the rigid unity offered by conceptual knowledge. And, although Schopenhauer's 'idealistic' version of aesthetic perception fails to accommodate several valuable ways in which artworks can convey ideas, thoughts, and emotions, his account of aesthetic contemplation in terms of will-lessness and objectivity is still rich in psychological insight. Questioning his perhaps rather extravagant Platonic metaphysics does not invalidate his aesthetic theory altogether, which discloses fundamental truths about the aesthetic mode of considering objects, enabling us to become alive to the world's most significant features.

I. DISINTERESTED PLEASURE (KANT)

Kant agrees with the empiricists that, '*gratification* and *pain* are always ultimately corporeal […] because life without the feeling of the corporeal organ is merely consciousness of one's own existence, but not a feeling of well- or ill-being',[4] but he wholly rejects the empiricist assimilation of pleasure in the beautiful to merely agreeable sensation. We value beauty not just because of our own private or 'egoistic' (*CJ*, 5:278) interests, nor because, as, for example, Edmund Burke holds, beauty stimulates our social passions, such as love. We experience and appreciate beauty as *a priori* shareable with others who possess similar discriminatory and judgemental capacities.

How does Kant distinguish between the feelings of the beautiful and the agreeable? Agreeable sensations are subjective responses, which depend upon our personal preferences and aversions. Pleasure in the agreeable is therefore, Kant argues, 'interested', whereas pleasure in the beautiful is not. In Section 2 of the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant writes: 'the satisfaction that we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called interest. Hence such a satisfaction always has at the same time a relation to the faculty of desire, either

[4] Immanuel Kant, *Kants Werke*, Akademie-Textausgabe, vol. 5, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), 277. Hereafter: *CJ*. The English translations are based on the translations by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Werner Pluhar (*Critique of Judgment*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

as its determining ground or else as necessarily interconnected with its determining ground.' (*CJ*, § 2, 5:204) In his insightful article 'Kant on Pleasure in the Agreeable', Nick Zangwill attempts to clarify this as follows:

> if a pleasure is an 'interest', in Kant's sense, it means that it bears an intimate relation to a desire (that is to say, a concern with real existence). An "interest" is a pleasure that has some kind of necessary connection with desire. A pleasure is "disinterested" if it has no such necessary connection with desire.[5]

Kant's conception of interest is broader than the idea of self-interest that Kant's reference to the capacity of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*) seems to suggest; thus, pleasures in the good – moral pleasures – are as 'interested' as pleasures in the agreeable, for they presuppose that the object is judged according to external standards of utility or in relation to ends that are external to it. Kant actually uses the term 'interest' throughout his writings in at least five distinct senses:[6]

(i) *pleasure* in the object's existence;

(ii) rational or sensory *desire*, the satisfaction of which is pleasant;

(iii) self-interest: direct promotion of one's preservation, welfare, or happiness;

(iv) that by which reason becomes practical or determines the will: the *attempt* to achieve a moral or prudential end;

(v) active *interaction* or engagement with an object.

Corresponding to these five senses of interest, the senses of disinterestedness are the following:[7]

(1) not taking pleasure in the object's existence;

(2) not having a rational or sensory desire;

(3) not directly promoting one's preservation, welfare, or happiness;

(4) not attempting to achieve a moral or prudential end;

(5) not being partial.[8]

This should suffice to show that the Kantian topics of interest and disinterestedness are extremely complex, and unfortunately Kant does not always clearly distinguish between the different senses of interest and disinterestedness

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5 Nick Zangwill, 'Kant on Pleasure in the Agreeable', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995): 167.

6 See Robert R. Clewis, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 146–47, to which the following is indebted. Clewes also mentions the references to Kant's work.

7 See ibid., 149.

8 Whereas the other senses of disinterestedness are clearly the negations of the positive senses of interest, sense 5 of disinterestedness (which can be found in *CJ*, § 13, 5:223) is a new addition to the list, as Clewis himself acknowledges (*Kantian Sublime*, 149). Clewis rightly argues that 'Kantian disinterestedness should not be identified with detachment, abstraction, or distance'.

he employs. Here we shall focus on Kant's idea of *aesthetic* disinterestedness, and more specifically still, on his analysis of judgements of beauty, hence leaving aside the question of the sublime's disinterestedness.[9]

Kant contends that our pleasure in the agreeable depends upon the real existence of the object which occasions it (that is to say, the 'appearance' of agreeableness is not sufficient to afford us pleasure). In pure judgements of taste, however, 'it is readily seen that to say that the 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' (*CJ*, § 2, 5:205). Thus, any particular interest in what kind of object it is, whether it is relevant to our aims, wants, or desires, even whether it is real, are not required for our *aesthetic* judging and enjoying the object. And because pure aesthetic judging is solely grounded in the object's singular appearance and not in any further personal interests, the pleasure it affords can be characterized as genuinely *disinterested*.

Two things must be specially noted here: first, disinterestedness is an aspect of the *pleasure* on which a pure judgement of taste is based, and second, the disinterested quality of the pleasure is a *logical* (not a psychological) requirement of pure judgements of taste, which arguably enables us to distinguish them from judgements of the agreeable and the good. It may, of course, be that some intellectual, sensual, and moral considerations supervene upon our aesthetic judging and liking. But this psychological fact is not an argument against Kant's analysis. On the contrary, those considerations may well be psychologically involved in our aesthetic judging, but Kant's point is the logical one that such elements are not necessary preconditions of aesthetic 'liking' (*Wohlgefallen*) and judgement. And while disinterestedness may sometimes take on a psychological character, since (as Kant suggests) 'a judgement of taste is merely contemplative' (*CJ*, § 5, 5:209), it can still be validly claimed that these psychological factors are not necessary requirements of pure judgements of taste.

Now, Kant further complicates matters by insisting not only that our pleasure in beautiful objects cannot originate from any interest, but also, and more importantly, that our pleasure in the beautiful does not *create* any interest in the object either. Agreeable objects, say Belgian chocolates, that cause pleasure merely because of their sensible properties, are said to 'gratify' (*vergnügen*) someone. More specifically, when I enjoy eating a Belgian chocolate, 'I am not granting mere approval: the agreeable produces an inclination' and 'arouses a desire for objects of the same kind' (*CJ*, § 3, 5:207). Kant, moreover, adds: 'all interest presupposes a need or gives rise to one; and, because interest is the basis that determines approval, it makes

[9] See Clewis, *Kantian Sublime*, ch. 4.

the judgment about the object un-free' (*CJ*, § 5, 5:210).[10] Hence, the basic difference between the agreeable and the beautiful must be that the agreeable gives rise to a desire for similar objects, whereas the feeling of the beautiful does not.

To make sense of this, we must recall that Kant contends that, unlike the beautiful, pleasure in the agreeable is connected with the *existence* of the object that caused the agreeable sensation in the first place – that is, the first sense of disinterestedness mentioned above. Thus Kant plausibly argues that, if the satisfaction caused by the object leads to a desire for more similar objects (for example, more Belgian chocolates), then this implies that the initial satisfaction was connected with the existence of the first object.[11] For how else could it produce this desire (or inclination) for more objects that are thought to be similar?

This contrast between the pleasures in the agreeable and the beautiful raises a number of worries. First, how plausible is Kant's claim that pleasures in the agreeable are necessarily productive of desire for more similar objects? Not all pleasures in the agreeable provoke the desire for more objects of the same kind. Put more concretely, as Zangwill asks, 'what about the last piece of chocolate that we enjoy before we have had enough? […] The sight of yet more chocolate can soon come to disgust one. It seems that the last pleasurable piece of chocolate does not provoke a desire for more of the same.'[12] Thus, although Kant may be right that many kinds of agreeable sensations are 'more-ish' or productively interested, not *all* pleasures in the agreeable are.

There is a second possible objection to Kant's distinction – namely, that Kant, as Paul Guyer notes, instead of distinguishing between kinds of pleasure, merely supplies 'a distinction between feelings of pleasure and all other kinds of sensation'.[13] Kant's view of pleasure is, however, more complicated than Guyer[14] allows. By defining pleasure as *feeling* instead of sensation, Kant is not merely saying that

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10 In 'Kant on Pleasure in the Agreeable', Zangwill rightly emphasizes that this 'unfreedom' of the pleasure in the agreeable is 'a matter of the causes of the pleasure. It does not detract from what Kant is saying about the way that pleasure then provokes desire, via a representation. If a pleasure is unfree, it is unfree because of the way it is caused, not because of what it causes' (p. 170).

11 This does not necessarily imply that Kant is offering a purely causal account of the interestedness of pleasure in the agreeable. I here concur with Zangwill, 'Kant on Pleasure in the Agreeable', 169: 'Once we see that Kant is not offering a purely causal account of the interestedness of pleasure in the agreeable, we will be less prone to think that he thinks that pleasure in the beautiful is disinterested because the pleasure bears no causal relation to the objects that we find pleasurable and thus call beautiful. If Kant did think this, it would make his claim that pleasure in the beautiful is disinterested very implausible. But fortunately Kant holds no such view.'

12 Ibid., 172.

13 Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 153.

14 Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 280–81, and Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 104–5.

pleasure is some peculiar kind of sensation, that is, a subjective sensation '*which cannot become an element of cognition at all*' (*CJ*, Intro., VII, 5:189), since it does not refer to objects. The subjective nature of Kant's notion of feeling is much more profound than that. Rachel Zuckert rightly suggests: 'pleasure is, on Kant's definition, a representation with intentional content, which comprises other representations understood to be modifications of the subject (that is, are themselves not [solely] referred to objects)'.[15] Kant characterizes pleasure in the *Critique of Judgement* as the 'consciousness of the causality of a representation with respect to the state of the subject, *for maintaining* it in that state' (*CJ*, § 10, 5:220), and in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, he claims: 'what directly (through sense) urges me to *leave* my state (to go out of it) is *disagreeable* to me – it causes me pain; just as what drives me to *maintain* my state (to remain in it) is *agreeable* to me, I enjoy it'.[16]

Thus, *pace* Guyer, Kant does not agree with the empiricists, who maintain that pleasure is a kind of primitive idea or raw sensation, but contends that pleasure is a feeling *about* something, or more accurately, about the continuation of the feeling or the mental state.[17] Pleasure in eating Belgian chocolates would then be the awareness or 'the feeling that the representation of chocolate is "causing" one to stay in the state of having that representation (of the taste of chocolate)'.[18] Pleasure is thus intimately connected with our 'feeling of life' (*Lebensgefühl*, *CJ*, 5:204, 277), that is, with enjoying the state one finds oneself in when, for instance, experiencing the sensible properties of an object. Thus, on this view, Kant does not consider pleasure a mere 'raw feel', as Guyer, like numerous other commentators, claims. Pleasure does not need to be referred to objects via empirical concepts or judgements, but is necessarily characterized by intentionality, that is, 'aboutness': it 'is about' a subject's mental state. It is therefore aptly called 'subjective' by Kant, even though it is not a sensation, but 'a second-order, reflexive state with respect both to other mental states and to the position of those states in time, the form of inner sense'.[19] We do not experience pleasure primarily as the separate effect of something, but we take pleasure *in* something, for example, in drinking a glass of Chablis, eating oysters, or sinking into a hot bath.[20]

15 Rachel Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 233. I here follow Zuckert's excellent account (233ff.) of the intentional nature of pleasure, yet I do not agree with her identification of the intentionality of pleasure with purposiveness without a purpose.

16 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary Gregor (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), 126 (*Kants Werke*, 7:231).

17 Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology*, 233.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 236. See also Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69–70.

20 Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology*, 236.

For Kant, an interest entails taking pleasure in the actual existence of the object. At first sight, this might seem to obscure the difference between pleasure in the beautiful and the agreeable. It seems as if Kant were claiming that the agreeable produces an interest in (or desire for) further experiences of the same sort, whereas the beautiful does not, and this (to say the least) seems highly implausible. Yet, while Kant does hold that any pleasure will tend towards maintaining itself, the tendency to prolong itself is *not* an interest in Kant's sense. By emphasizing that the agreeable *is* connected with an interest in objects of the same kind, whereas the beautiful is not, Kant intimates that the former provokes not a desire for more similar experiences, but for more *objects* of the same kind, that is, objects that will offer such (agreeable) experiences, whereas the pleasure in the beautiful is wholly disinterested, since it may (and usually will) urge us to maintain the specific state of aesthetic pleasure we find ourselves in, but does not necessarily stimulate a desire for the actual existence of the object, since our pleasure in a beautiful object stems from the contemplation of the object's form alone and is grounded in the free but harmonious 'play' of imagination and understanding (as I shall discuss below).

Although, as we have seen, disinterestedness is first and foremost a *logical* requirement of judgements of beauty and does not primarily refer to any specific aspect of a mental state, Kant does develop some psychological aspects of the way in which we experience and enjoy beauty. The disinterestedness of pure judgements of taste will, first, be related to what Kant calls the feeling of life (*Lebensgefühl*) of the subject – which is why he calls the pleasure in the beautiful *Wohlgefallen* ('liking') and not *Vergnügen* ('gratification'). Second, and more important, Kant contrasts pure beauty with the 'graceful, lovely, enchanting, enjoyable, etc.', arguing that judgements of pure beauty are 'independent from charm and emotion' (*CJ*, § 13, 5:223) and that our pleasure in beautiful objects is not due to a mere physiological response to an object's qualities but arises from 'a state of a *free play* of the faculties of cognition' (*CJ*, § 9, 5:217). Kant further insists that our aesthetic judging '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', and he adds that 'on that universality of the subjective conditions of the judging of objects alone is this universal subjective validity of liking, which we combine with the representation of the object that we call beautiful, grounded' (*CJ*, § 9, 5:218). I shall not go into all the intricacies that commentators have addressed in connection with the arguments which Kant provides to ground his distinction between merely agreeable sensations and genuine feelings (and judgements) of beauty. It should now be clear, however, that Kant's insistence on the logical requirement of disinterestedness ultimately and fundamentally depends upon his epistemology. More specifically, because

disinterested aesthetic pleasure 'is not grounded in any concept […], no other consciousness of it is possible except through sensation of the effect that consists in the facilitated play of both powers of the mind (imagination and understanding), enlivened through mutual agreement' (*CJ*, § 9, 5:219).

That our judgement is a genuine judgement of beauty can only be found out if we are able to retrieve the epistemic basis of the feeling of pleasure we experience and upon which we base our judgement. Only if the pleasure is not merely a personal physiological response to external stimuli but can be attributed correctly to the purposeful play of our cognitive capacities can it be inferred that our judgement is a pure judgement of taste. That Kant remains extremely vague about the method and outcome of such an introspective investigation is unfortunate, but is not our primary concern here.[21] Far more important is that the disinterested character of the pleasure on which our aesthetic judgement is based ultimately depends upon the object's potential to stimulate our cognitive faculties, thereby enabling us to recognize the object's form as *purposive* in relation to 'cognition generally'. That is to say, whereas beauty can only be consciously recognized through the pleasure we feel in it, this pleasure itself is ultimately grounded in heightened purposeful cognitive activity, involving the mutual quickening of understanding and imagination.

Only now can we genuinely grasp Kant's insistence on the disinterestedness of pure aesthetic pleasure. Our aesthetic judgement is, as Paul Crowther puts it,

> teleological in a subjective sense. On the one hand, the judgement has 'formal finality' in so far as the beautiful configuration appears *as if* it has been created for the express purpose of stimulating cognitive exploration; on the other hand, the free harmonious interaction of understanding and imagination which it brings about is 'subjectively final' in relation to cognition generally. This means that in renewing cognition's structural basis, it can be regarded as teleologically significant in relation to the attainment of knowledge – even though it is not, in itself, a claim to knowledge.[22]

Unfortunately, because Kant essentially confines himself to showing that our pleasure in the beautiful differs from the agreeable and the good, which are clearly connected with interest, he leaves us with no convincing independent argument that pleasure in the beautiful *is* actually disinterested. By no means does the fact that the pleasure in the beautiful is different from the agreeable and the good, which are definitely connected with interest, entail that the pleasure in the beautiful is disinterested. Thus, instead of offering us a convincing account

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21 I have discussed this elsewhere. See Bart Vandenabeele, 'The Subjective Universality of Aesthetic Judgements Revisited', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48 (2008): 410–25.

22 Paul Crowther, 'The Significance of Kant's Pure Aesthetic Judgment', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36 (1996): 115.

of the disinterestedness of aesthetic pleasure, he leaves us with the quite controversial idea that pleasure in the beautiful cannot originate from or give rise to any interest (*CJ*, § 2, 5:205n; § 3, 5:206–7). It is hard to see, however, why this should be so. For, after all, appreciating beauty does give rise to all sorts of interests – one may desire to own the artwork one finds beautiful or to make love to the woman one finds beautiful or develop a religious interest on the basis of one's aesthetic pleasure in nature. Kant was surely aware of this, and whereas he may still be right that all those kinds of interests (be they intellectual, moral, or sensual) which we may develop as a result of enjoying beauty cannot provide the necessary determining ground of *pure* judgements of taste, most of our judgements of beauty are not pure but are mingled with other interests – they are cases, as Kant would urge, of 'dependent beauty'.

Now from this overview, and before turning to Schopenhauer's account of disinterestedness, it should be clear that Kant's idea of aesthetic disinterestedness (in the beautiful) does not presuppose any kind of aesthetic attitude theory – although it may perhaps not be irreconcilable with such a theory. For, instead of developing the idea that judging beauty requires a detachment from the object of one's own desires, Kant claims that appreciating beauty involves reflecting *activity* of our cognitive faculties on the (form of) the judged object and on the ground of our pleasure. Contrary to mere sensory judgements of the agreeable, a judgement of beauty clearly by necessity involves cognitive activity, whereby our imagination and understanding produce pleasure or displeasure. Judgements of beauty are *reflective* judgements, which means that – although they are non-cognitive because they are based on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure and not on any determinate concepts – they presuppose cognitive activity, more specifically the purposeful 'play' of our imagination and understanding; and the pleasure we take in the beautiful is rightfully characterized as disinterested only because it is ultimately *grounded in* the 'free harmonious play' of imagination and understanding, which reciprocally enliven each other and purposefully accord. Thus the disinterested quality of our pleasure does not merely refer to, but actually *arises from*, a harmonious relation between our cognitive faculties, which is purposive with regard to cognition in general.[23]

We thus arrive at what, on Kant's views, is the distinctive (albeit somewhat paradoxical) source of pure aesthetic pleasure: the disinterestedness of our pleasure in the beautiful is ultimately based upon the *interests* of the cognitive faculties to engage with and cognitively to explore the formal features of an object. By exploring

[23] See *CJ*, § 9, 5:217, and § 12, 5:222. See also Bart Vandenabeele, 'Beauty, Disinterested Pleasure, and Universal Communicability: Kant's Response to Burke', *Kant-Studien* (forthcoming).

various shapes, contours, and randomly trying out several configurations, they stimulate and enliven each other, without their activity being determined by the application of concepts to the phenomenal unity: 'we *linger* over the consideration of the beautiful' (*CJ*, § 12, 5:222). For Kant, aesthetic reflection somehow attempts to realize the ultimate goals of cognition in the absence of the subsumption of sensory intuitions under determinate concepts. 'Imagination,' he says, 'must in the judgment of taste be considered in its freedom […] not taken as reproductive, as subjected to the laws of association, but as productive and self-active (as originator of arbitrary forms of possible intuitions).' (*CJ*, § 22, General Remark, 5:240) To make sense of this, we must recall that in ordinary cognition the imagination operates in the service of the understanding's determining activity: it is not free but produces schemata that enable conceptual determination and identification of objects. The specific reflective nature of aesthetic appreciation precludes, however, the mutual accord of imagination and understanding from resulting in a conceptual determination of the object. In aesthetic reflection the imagination gains a freedom that surpasses the subservient role it plays in ordinary cognition.[24]

Now, while Kant grounds the disinterested pleasure of beauty in the 'free harmonious play' of the cognitive powers, Schopenhauer too associates beauty with the quickening of our cognitive capacities, and (again like Kant) contends that pure aesthetic perception cannot be based on a subsumption of intuitions under determinate concepts. He transforms the Kantian transcendental analysis of beauty, however, into a psychological theory of will-free consciousness and deep absorption, which (i) necessarily involves detachment from individual desires, urges, and affects, and (ii) affords a superior kind of cognition of the aesthetic object's universal essence. Thus, whereas Kant founds his distinction between the agreeable and the beautiful on the presence or absence of any specific prudential, personal, or moral interest in the actual existence of the object, and claims that pleasure in the beautiful is transcendentally grounded in the 'free harmonious play' of our cognitive powers, which is free from regulation by determinate concepts, Schopenhauer founds the distinction between the 'alluring' (or 'charming', that is, *das Reizende*) and the beautiful on the criterion whether our perception of the object is in the service of our individual interests, needs, and wants, that is, our will. As we shall see, he ultimately identifies the 'experience' of beauty with a depersonalized, will-less state of inner peace and tranquillity, which affords not merely relief from pain and suffering but also genuine cognition of the timeless (and, as Schopenhauer insists, Platonic) Ideas.

Having provided an exposition of Kant's theory of disinterested beauty and discussed some of its merits and flaws, I am now in a position to clarify how Schopenhauer, while retaining Kant's insight that beauty stimulates our cognitive

[24] See *CJ*, § 22, General Remark, 5:241.

capacities in an unusually lively way, radically transforms the Kantian idea that beauty is based upon free reflection on an object without ulterior cognitive aim into the idea that beauty is based upon the will-free contemplation of an object's universal essence. It is to Schopenhauer's contrast between interested cognition in the service of the will and painless will-free contemplation, which arguably characterizes aesthetic cognition, that I now turn.

II. DISINTERESTED PERCEPTION (SCHOPENHAUER)

Inspired by Schelling's essay on *The Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), amongst others, Schopenhauer claims that the whole of reality is basically the expression of a blind unconscious will, and holds that the intellect (which he identifies physiologically with the brain) is merely an instrument of this will. Following Hume, Schopenhauer also holds that the subject's intellectual imposition of space, time, and causality on experience is driven by human needs, interests, and affects. The intellect is governed by the will: it is merely the will's tool.[25] Again following Hume, Schopenhauer thus contends that one's intellect can be and often is disturbed by the will, that is, by affects, urges, needs, inclinations, and passions:

> In our enemies we see nothing but shortcomings, in our favourites nothing but merits and good points, and even their defects seem amiable to us. [...] What is opposed to our party, our plan, our wish, or our hope often cannot possibly be grasped and comprehended by us, whereas it is clear to the eyes of everyone else; on the other hand, what is favourable to these leaps to our eyes from afar. What opposes the heart is not admitted by the head. […] Thus is our intellect daily befooled and corrupted by the deceptions of inclination and liking. (*WWR*, 2:217–18)

The will clouds our judgements and the intellect ordinarily functions in the service of the will. Everything that takes place without the intellect – an organism's procreation, development, and preservation, the healing of wounds, the critical stage that brings about salvation during an illness, the instinctive skills of animals, and so forth – turns out infinitely better than what happens with the help of the intellect.[26]

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[25] For the intellect as the instrument or tool (*Werkzeug*) of the will, see *WWR*, 1:292, 2:205, 2:214, 2:215, 2:220, 2:225, 2:229, 2:398, and 2:641.

[26] See *WWR*, 2:269: 'If the intellect were not of a secondary nature, [...] then everything that takes place without it, in other words, without the intervention of the representations, such, for example, as generation, procreation, the development and preservation of the organism, the healing of wounds, the restoration or vicarious repair of mutilated parts, the salutary crisis in diseases, the works of animal mechanical skill, and the activity of instinct in general, would not turn out infinitely better and more perfect than what takes place with the aid of the intellect, namely all the conscious and intended achievements and works of men. Such works and achievements, when compared with those others, are mere botching and bungling.' See also Bart Vandenabeele, 'Schopenhauer on Sense Perception and Aesthetic Cognition', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 45 (2011): 37–57.

Thus Schopenhauer distances himself completely from the 'ancient and universal error' of the Western tradition, which reveres intellect and reason as the most perfect hallmark of humanity.[27] For Schopenhauer, however, the intellect is 'at bottom tertiary, since it presupposes the organism, and the organism presupposes the will' (*WWR*, 2:278).

Though the whole world, including human life, is, however, nothing but an uncanny puppet show of one and the same blind and ruthless will, we do not have to give up considering things altogether to be able to attain a state of pure, will-less, and painless perception or intuition (*Anschauung*). For, during a few scarce moments in our lives, all of a sudden

> we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves. We are no longer the individual that knows in the interest of its constant willing; the correlative of the particular thing to which objects become motives, but the eternal subject of knowing purified of the will, the correlative of the Idea. And we know that these moments, when, delivered from the fierce pressure of the will, we emerge, as it were, from the heavy atmosphere of the earth, are the most blissful that we experience. (*WWR*, 1:390)

Schopenhauer here characterizes a peculiar state of consciousness, in which we are still live subjects and yet become aware of ourselves as pure, *will-less* subjects of knowledge, who have overcome the ordinary state of willing individuals in which we ordinarily find ourselves. In this state of pure contemplation, we are raised 'above all willing, above all desires and cares', and are able to experience what it is to be overwhelmed by the perception of an object. This state of pure contemplation (in which we become, as it were, *one* with the object we perceive) is, Schopenhauer argues, *aesthetic* (*WWR*, 1:178). In aesthetic experience we cease to view objects in relation to our will: our ordinary *empirical* consciousness of the object, which is determined by the subjective forms of space, time, and causality, has been suspended and replaced by a pure will-free way of perceiving. We are fully absorbed in the object and lose ourselves in the contemplation of it:

> When, however, an external cause or inward disposition suddenly raises us out of the endless stream of willing, and snatches knowledge from the thraldom of the will, the attention

[27] See *WWR*, 2:199: 'The remarkable phenomenon that in this fundamental and essential point all philosophers have erred, in fact have completely reversed the truth, might be partly explained, especially in the case of the philosophers of the Christian era, from the fact that all of them aimed at presenting man as differing as widely as possible from the animal. Yet, they felt vaguely that the difference between the two was to be found in the intellect and not in the will.'

> is now no longer directed to the motives of willing, but comprehends things free from their relation to the will. Thus it considers things without interest, without subjectivity, *purely objectively*; it is entirely given up to them in so far as they are merely representations, and not motives. Then all at once the peace, always sought but always escaping us on that first path of willing, comes to us of its own accord, and all is well with us [*uns ist völlig wohl*]. (*WWR*, 1:196; emphasis added)

The passionate way in which Schopenhauer describes the aesthetic experience is related to his basically pessimistic view of man and world. From his youth onwards, Schopenhauer had been looking for a way of approaching the world that could – at least momentarily – offer a way out of the thraldom of the will and the suffering that is inextricably linked up with it. In 1812, when he was still in Berlin, he already seems to have identified the experience of aesthetic pleasure as the ideal way to escape from the misery of ordinary empirical consciousness of the world, which is full of horror and suffering, and enter into the blissful state of what he then still called the *better consciousness*.[28] Ordinary consciousness is embodied and connected with individual interests and desires, and since those can only be momentarily satisfied and will constantly be replaced by new ones, they inevitably lead to the pain of unfulfilled desire. The better consciousness, however, is an 'experience' of being purified of one's own human individuality – which is not really an experience in the usual sense, for (strictly speaking) there is no individual being to experience this, but only a pure, de-individualized mental state and impersonal 'vanishing point', a 'clear mirror of the object', an imperceptible perceiver – pure awareness of harmony, tranquillity, and, Schopenhauer insists, even 'unearthly serenity' (*WWR*, 2:380).

What Schopenhauer describes here is a complex state of mind that is completely purified of emotion, desire, needs, and interests, but is by no means passive or apathetic. It creates a radical rupture with ordinary empirical consciousness, which is naturally in the service of our individual needs, urges, and affects, and is somehow more passive, for it is a mere physiological reaction of our will to the environment.[29] Certain experiences, Schopenhauer argues, are so intense that they are able to lift us above ourselves and enable us to get rid of all the lumber of individual emotions, desires, and even thoughts. Our individuality has vanished and all that is left is a state of

[28] The term 'better consciousness' occurs persistently in the 1812–14 notebooks. See Arthur Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains*, vol. 1, *Early Manuscripts (1804–1818)*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Berg, 1988), 23–24, 43, 44, 48–52, 53–55, 57, 72, 73–74, 83, 86, 98, 113–14, 120, 132, 162, 164, 165, 191.

[29] For an excellent account of the role of pain and desire in Schopenhauer's philosophy, see Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 109–19.

de-individualized, 'pure' subjectivity which is no longer determined by the urges of individual willing.[30]

Thus, for Schopenhauer, beauty rests on the disinterested objectivity of perception. He even claims: 'everything is beautiful only so long as it does not concern us' (*WWR*, 2:374). The drastic nature of this definition cannot be sufficiently stressed. All typically human, individual ways of considering an object are suspended and what remains is a subject without an *ego*, which perceives the aesthetic object emotionless, thoughtless – we come to see the world 'from outside' (*WWR*, 1:372). An experience of beauty is thus, on Schopenhauer's terms, abnormal: a purely disinterested, will-less, and detached (but also, paradoxically, unusually intense and focused) state of consciousness, in which we have transcended our individual interests, and have ultimately become the object's 'pure mirror' (*WWR*, 2:367). In aesthetic contemplation we have become somehow disengaged and even estranged from the world, for we have adopted a stance in which 'the entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception' (*WWR*, 1:179), and which enables us to become alive to usually unnoticed significant features of objects. Thus, aesthetic objects are no longer perceived according to their relations to other objects but as what they are in themselves, and we remain 'detached' spectators, for we no longer consider the object in its relation to our will, that is, our desires, needs, interests, and wants.

This 'abnormal' aesthetic state of mind, which offers an 'escape' from the ordinary way of estimating an object, cannot, however, proceed from a conscious act of will (*Akt der Willkür*): we cannot *decide* to enter into the blessed state of the better consciousness but have to be stimulated by an object through which we can enter into a peaceful, timeless, and tranquil state of mind:

> The change in the subject required for this, just because it consists in the elimination of all willing, cannot proceed from the will, and hence cannot be an arbitrary act of will, in other words, cannot rest with us. […] Such a state of itself eliminates the will from

[30] According to some commentators, it is impossible to see why the will, the thing-in-itself underlying the world as a whole, should make it possbile for the intellect to break free from its dominance. In aesthetic experience, however, the intellect breaks free from the urges of individual willing. Furthermore, as Neill argues, 'it is far from impossible to see why the Will, that which underlies the world of representation as a whole […], should have allowed – indeed guaranteed the actualisation of – this possibility'. Alex Neill, 'Aesthetic Experience in Schopenhauer's Metaphysics of Will', in *Better Consciousness: Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Value*, ed. Alex Neill and Christopher Janaway (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 38. Since the cosmic will strives for ever-greater visibility, to attain 'full self-consciousness', it has to bring about a state of consciousness that is capable of apprehending the most adequate 'objectivations' of will, that is, the (Platonic) Ideas. The aesthetic state of mind is, on Schopenhauer's view, precisely such a state. *Pace* Neill, I would suggest, however, that a whiff of paradox remains in Schopenhauer's system, since one may still wonder how and why a blind, irrational will would be interested in attaining full self-consciousness.

> consciousness, and in it all things stand before us with enhanced clearness and distinctness, so that we are aware almost alone *of them* and hardly at all *of ourselves*. Therefore our whole consciousness is hardly anything more than the medium through which the perceived object appears in the world as representation. Thus pure will-less knowledge is reached by the consciousness of other things being raised to so high a potential that the consciousness of our own selves vanishes. For we apprehend the world purely objectively, only when we no longer know that we belong to it; and all things appear the more beautiful, the more we are conscious merely of them, and the less we are conscious of ourselves. (*WWR*, 2:367–68)

This passage already partly reveals to what extent Schopenhauer's theory of disinterested perception really departs from Kant's aesthetic theory. Although Schopenhauerian will-lessness clearly echoes Kant's concept of disinterestedness, Schopenhauer radically breaks with the idea that aesthetic experience is based on the reflection and feeling, let alone the *Lebensgefühl*, of a judging subject. First, Schopenhauer's aesthetic subject is a 'pure' subject in which the capacity to judge – not only of determining but also of reflecting judgement – has vanished altogether. Schopenhauer's pure aesthetic subject does not judge; it is not detached in the sense that it takes some distance to be able to judge the object; it is, on the contrary, totally absorbed by the object. It does not behave as someone who, after many years, meets an old friend again and studies her features to see whether she has changed much, but as a passionate lover who is so madly in love that he forgets everything, even himself, and melts together with the other and becomes one with her. And even this comparison is inaccurate, for Schopenhauer warns us against too romantic an identification of aesthetic beauty with amorous passion (*WWR*, 2:374): despite his use of terms such as rapture, exaltation, and enjoyment, the type of awareness he describes is *not* a matter of our emotions, affects, or feelings, but of inner peace, serenity, complete objectivity, and painless contemplation; our will and emotions are expelled from consciousness and we perceive the object as universal.

Moreover, for Schopenhauer, an experience of beauty is not, as Kant insisted, based upon our 'feeling of life' (*CJ*, § 1, 5:204),[31] but is rather an intimation of *death*: the world has become 'something foreign' to us (*WWR*, 2:387), and we lose ourselves and 'become the pure mirror of the objective inner nature of things' (*WWR*, 2:367); 'we have stepped into another world […] where everything that moves our will […] no longer exists' (*WWR*, 1:197), and are aware only of the deprivation of everything that is typical of individual human being.[32] We have

[31] See also Kant, *Anthropology*, § 60, 126 (*Kants Werke*, 7:231).

[32] See *WWR*, 1:178, 1:195–96. This raises the complex question of whether and how aesthetic pleasure can really occur in a will-less subject. For further discussion, see Alfred Schmidt, 'Wesen, Ort und Funktion der Kunst in der Philosophie Schopenhauers', in *Schopenhauer*

become will-less, timeless, and totally disengaged subjects – subjects without *egos*; so hardly subjects at all, since we remain 'wholly foreign to, and detached from, the scene to be contemplated', and adopt 'the view from nowhere' (*WWR*, 2:373). We have become so overwhelmed by the perception of the object, that we are no longer conscious of our individual selves and have temporarily become disposed of our own living nature, our own will to life (ibid.).

Third, whereas Kant claims that an aesthetic judgement's 'determining ground *cannot* be *other than subjective*' (*CJ*, § 1, 5:203), Schopenhauer will argue, as we shall see, that aesthetic experience is concerned not with subjective feeling but with *objective cognition*. Instead of reflecting upon our individual feelings of pleasure or displeasure, Schopenhauer urges that in aesthetic perception (or intuition) 'the consciousness of our own selves vanishes. For we apprehend the world *purely objectively* […] and all things appear the more beautiful, the more we are conscious merely of them, and the less we are conscious of ourselves.' (*WWR*, 1:368; italics added) Aesthetic consciousness is thus not merely an escape from the torments of our existence as willing subjects, but somehow offers us objective understanding and knowledge of the world. A peculiar type of knowledge it is, however: not based on (determinate) concepts, as in the 'subjective' kind of knowledge that is scientific knowledge, for instance, but knowledge of what Schopenhauer calls (Platonic) *Ideas*. Schopenhauer was always fascinated with the possibility of a 'better consciousness', not only as a kind of awareness that enables us to escape from the sufferings that are inherent in our nature as willing individuals, but also as a path to a superior kind of knowledge and understanding which transcends the ordinary way of perceiving and coping with the world around us and our place in it (*WWR*, 1:372, 2:386).

Although Schopenhauer continually identifies the Ideas as Platonic – as timeless, universal essences – this crucial observation intimates that his characterization of artwork in terms of vehicles of knowledge and understanding that transcend our determinate conceptual knowledge of objects is remarkably close to Kant's suggestion that works of art communicate *aesthetic ideas*. Aesthetic ideas, Kant says, are the products of the artist's imagination, which strives 'toward something that lies beyond the bounds of experience' – or more precisely, 'inner intuitions [*innern Anschauungen*] to which no concept can be completely adequate' (*CJ*, § 49, 5:314). This is exactly the thought that we find in Schopenhauer, but it should not blind us to the important differences between their respective views: as we have

und die Künste, ed. Günther Baum and Dieter Birnbacher (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 14–15; Bart Vandenabeele, 'Schopenhauer on the Values of Aesthetic Experience', *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 45 (2007): 565–82, and Bart Vandenabeele, 'Schopenhauer and the Objectivity of Art', in *A Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Bart Vandenabeele (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 219–33.

seen, aesthetic imagination is, for Kant, 'productive', for it invents intuitions and produces new configurations, whereas for Schopenhauer the Ideas are timeless universals that the artist *discovers* by adopting an objectifying, disinterested and de-personalized stance towards the world. Schopenhauer, too, highlights the importance of imagination (*Phantasie*); but whereas, for Kant, imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) in its productive mode conjures up new aesthetic ideas, for Schopenhauer, imagination is a capacity that enables us to *discover* Platonic universals that are, somehow, ontologically present in the universe, in and through particular aesthetic objects.[33] Nonetheless, the suggestion that art works communicate ideas that offer a kind of understanding or knowledge that cannot be reduced to the knowledge we gain through concepts is important, for it gives the lie to those that consider aesthetic cognition to be inferior to the (scientific and philosophical) sort of knowledge that is conceptual in nature.

Yet what kind of knowledge Schopenhauer has in mind when he characterizes will-less aesthetic knowledge in terms of knowledge of timeless Ideas still remains puzzling. One commentator offers the following: 'The Ideas might just be ordinary perceptual objects […] their universality having to do […] with the selectiveness of attention paid to them by the observer […]. Perceiving an Idea […] is a matter of perceiving an ordinary object but with one's attention focussed on its essential, and away from its inessential aspects.'[34] What is significant in an object, however, does not necessarily coincide with the 'universal' it is supposed to be an instance of.[35] In artworks minute details of brushwork, colour hues, voice timbre, and so forth, are often more artistically relevant and significant than the ideas conveyed. Moreover, the universal ideas that are expressed in some masterpiece painting may often be rather trivial. If the way in which the artist renders the subject-matter does not really engage us in stimulating and moving ways and enrich our imaginative capacities, the artwork will not be of much value (and will definitely not lead to the blissful state of the 'better consciousness' which Schopenhauer identifies as the aesthetic attitude). Good art not only occasions interesting ideas but also develops our capacities for discrimination and appreciation. The value of a work of art mainly depends on the way it penetrates and shapes our grasp of the ideas and attitudes conveyed. Art's cognitive value cannot be reduced to the ideas – Platonic or not – that they express and communicate. The way in which they stimulate our imaginative perception and shape our discriminatory capacities

33 See *WWR*, 1:186–87 and below.

34 Julian Young, 'The Standpoint of Eternity: Schopenhauer on Art', *Kant-Studien* 78 (1987): 434.

35 Christopher Janaway, 'Knowledge and Tranquillity: Schopenhauer on the Value of Art', in *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Dale Jacquette (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 53.

is at least as important a value of good art as conveying crucial thoughts or ideas might be.

Schopenhauer's Platonic idealism fails to accommodate for the particularly valuable way in which art can *express* ideas, thoughts, emotions, and attitudes. This is a fundamental value of good art, though. Take, for example, any work by such masters as Rogier van der Weyden, Lorenzo Lotto, René Magritte, and Alberto Giacometti. The ideas they convey and the themes they treat may at times be trivial, but the value of their work does not solely (nor perhaps primarily) depend on the content of the ideas they communicate. It is the sophisticated, complex, and often radical way those artists challenge, shape, and transform our visual attention and imagination, using multiple revolutionary techniques and contrasting distinct detailing that renders some of their works eminent masterpieces. Even though Schopenhauer does pay some attention to the exquisite way in which Dutch still-life painters manage to direct 'such purely objective perception to the most insignificant objects, and set up a lasting monument of their objectivity and spiritual peace in paintings of *still life*', and 'in the same spirit landscape painters, especially Ruysdael, have often painted extremely insignificant landscape objects, and have thus produced the same effect even more delightfully' (*WWR*, 1:197), he still seems too preoccupied with defending art against Plato's estimation of it.

Now, for Plato, art is worthless and even harmful, since it only offers the illusion of knowledge and leads us away from a genuine understanding of the world. Contra Plato, Schopenhauer argues that art can afford true knowledge and understanding. He is so eager to repudiate Plato's scathingly negative estimation of art by offering a Platonic answer himself, that he does not pay sufficient attention to the way in which art can be cognitively significant *not* because it necessarily conveys universal, timeless Ideas, but, more important, because of the way it shapes, expands, and deepens our cognitive and imaginative capacities and enriches our mental life. The way in which such artists as Bach, Shakespeare, Keats, Wilde, Magritte, to name just a few, have been successful in modifying the forms, styles, and media by which they transmit their ideas explains the significance and timeless value of their work. Not (primarily) because they communicated universal or revolutionary ideas, but because they expressed their ideas in absorbing, moving, and enriching ways, and shaped how we look at what their art expresses. Thus what matters is not primarily the nature or content of the ideas themselves, but whether the media and styles of representing or expressing them deepen our responses to them and shape and modify our grasp of the ideas conveyed – and not necessarily, as Schopenhauer would have it, how they enable us to adopt an objectifying, 'disengaged' stance towards the miseries of the world, in which we feel no longer concerned by them.

Still, Schopenhauer's insistence (contra Kant) that aesthetic experience affords knowledge and has clear cognitive value is a theoretical gain over Kant. For Schopenhauer argues that aesthetic perception is superior to ordinary perception. For the sight of the aesthetically pleasing object makes us 'objective', Schopenhauer says: 'that is to say, in contemplating it we are no longer conscious of ourselves as individuals, but as pure, will-less subjects of knowing' (*WWR*, 1:209; see also *WWR*, 1:195 and *passim*). This heightened, 'objective' state of consciousness discards the embodied, willing self and frees us from the pressures and torments of willing and from what Plato calls the 'desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense' caused by the fact that we are *embodied* creatures.[36] Kant, however, recognizes that the cognitive powers are involved in aesthetic experience, yet clearly refrains from identifying pure aesthetic experience with cognition of universal aspects of an object. Schopenhauer argues that perceiving (and, hence, enjoying) something aesthetically presupposes that our ordinary categories of perception are suspended, which implies that objects are no longer apprehended in relation to other objects, and, second, that we do not consider objects in relation to our will. But Kant does not believe that objects of aesthetic experience are seen in a fundamentally different manner (let alone, as Schopenhauer insists, *sub aeternitatis specie*, that is, from the standpoint of eternity) nor that our ordinary categories of perception are suspended, nor that the aesthetic subject's consciousness is fundamentally transformed into a pure objective consciousness.

Thus Schopenhauer's conception of 'pure objective consciousness' is closer to the Platonic ideal of 'pure knowledge of the soul' than to Kant's conception of aesthetic experience. As Schopenhauer puts it, in aesthetic contemplation 'we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the *what*' (*WWR*, 1:178). Aesthetic will-less perception, which Schopenhauer identifies with Spinoza's notion of knowledge *sub aeternitatis specie* offers insight into the timeless kernel of things, that is, the universal essences of the perceived objects, beyond mere appearance. Schopenhauer calls these eternal essences the (Platonic) Ideas, the 'eternal forms' behind the mere appearances of common empirical cognition. Here, again, he clearly moves beyond Kant's analysis of aesthetic disinterestedness, and appropriates a more Platonic vision of knowledge of eternal Ideas.

Yet, two considerations seem to stand in the way of identifying Schopenhauer's Ideas with their Platonic counterparts. First, whereas Plato held that knowledge

[36] Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin, 1969), 111 (66a–b). In Schopenhauer's account aesthetic pleasure is experienced by an embodied individual. But in aesthetic experience, consciousness of oneself as embodied individual is drastically diminished and even abolished.

of the eternal forms of things involves conceptual thought and ratiocination, Schopenhauer maintains that reason is an instrument of the will that helps us survive as living organisms in the natural world. For Schopenhauer, the timeless Ideas are not known through abstract reasoning, but *in* and *through* intuition of natural objects or works of art, combined with an idealizing act of our imagination (*WWR*, 1:186–87). Whereas 'the common, ordinary man […] can direct his attention to things only in so far as they have some relation to his will', and 'always demands only knowledge of the relations, the abstract concept of the thing is sufficient'; in aesthetic cognition, however, one 'strives to grasp the Idea of each thing, not its relation to other things' (*WWR*, 1:187–88). Thus the Ideas – that is, the alleged objects of aesthetic cognition – are known by a peculiar type of *imaginative perception*, which is purely contemplative and does not involve any concepts at all. This statement clearly echoes Kant's thought that a pure aesthetic judgement cannot be based on (determinate) concepts, but it also radically departs from Kant, for Schopenhauer insists that an aesthetic experience is first and foremost a kind of *objective insight*, whereas Kant argues that it is based on a reflecting judgement, which is grounded in a disinterested feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and does not contribute to cognition at all.[37] Although the gap between Kant's and Schopenhauer's aesthetics may not be as big as some commentators suggest,[38] Schopenhauer's discussion of the will-less, timeless state of consciousness – which is purportedly the essence of the aesthetic attitude – is definitely more Platonic than Kantian. Still, as we have seen, Schopenhauer's so-called '(Platonic) Ideas' appear less Platonic than Schopenhauer is prepared to admit.

A further worry about a hasty identification of Plato's and Schopenhauer's theories of Ideas is that, for Plato, the Ideas are not merely the eternal universals behind the mere empirical appearances of things, but also the ontological foundation of the whole world, whereas in Schopenhauer's view, the Ideas are situated metaphysically 'between' the thing-in-itself (the will) and the empirical appearances. The Ideas are not the fundamental components of reality, but the most adequate manifestations of the one ultimate essence of the world – namely, will. Schopenhauer argues that, since the categories of space and time, and the understanding or intellect (operating according to the principle of sufficient reason), ground and even 'construct' the world as representation, this world is divided into numerous distinct objects, and is therefore characterized by plurality. Those categories do not apply to the thing in itself, which belongs to the noumenal

37 See *CJ*, § 3, 5:206: 'the presentation is referred solely to the subject and is not used for cognition at all, not even for that by which the subject cognizes himself'.

38 See, for example, Christopher Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness: Reading Nietzsche's Genealogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194: 'The vision behind Schopenhauer's theory of aesthetic experience is Platonic, not Kantian.'

world, hence (Schopenhauer argues) the thing-in-itself cannot be characterized by plurality. Schopenhauer reasons as follows:

(1) the categories of space and time and the categories of the understanding – the principle of sufficient reason – create the objective world (the world as representation);
(2) the world as representation therefore consists of multiple representations or different objects;
(3) the principle of sufficient reason is limited to the world as representation;
(4) the principle of sufficient reason cannot apply to the thing-in-itself (the *noumenon*);
(5) the thing-in-itself beyond all phenomena cannot be characterized by multiplicity;
(6) the Ideas are characterized by multiplicity;
(7) the Ideas cannot be the noumenal thing-in-itself.

These claims entail a number of problems, not least because they are further enmeshed in Schopenhauer's basic metaphysical view that the thing-in-itself is the will, which automatically implies that the will ought to remain unknowable, and Schopenhauer does not (always) recognize this.[39] Moreover, his analysis of empirical perception is combined with and, I would add, unnecessarily clouded by his semi-Platonic account of the Ideas, which he argues to be the adequate 'objectivations' of the metaphysical will. Schopenhauer seems rather confused when he contends that the Platonic Ideas reveal the antagonistic nature of the metaphysical will, which they would express by struggling to conquer their spot in the universe and by fighting the other Ideas to be able to manifest themselves as clearly as possible in the empirical world.

For the purposes of his aesthetics, however, it is quite unnecessary to think that the Platonic Ideas are the adequate 'objectivations' of the thing-in-itself, that is, the will.[40] Instead, what might ground aesthetic cognition is the idea that, though we are

[39] An exception can be found in *WWR*, 2:198, where he concedes that 'being known of itself contradicts being-in-itself'. Moreover, Schopenhauer explicitly contends that his philosophy is 'immanent in the Kantian sense of the word' and 'for this reason […] still leaves many questions untouched' (*WWR*, 2:640). This, however, hardly puts all problems regarding the possibility of knowledge of the thing-in-itself to rest. See Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 188–207, for extended criticism of Schopenhauer's view. For a more sympathetic account, see Volker Spierling, *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosophie als Kunst und Erkenntnis* (Zurich: Haffmans, 1994), 223–40, and Daniel Schubbe, *Philosophie des Zwischen: Hermeneutik und Aporetik bei Schopenhauer* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010).

[40] For a thorough comparison of Plato's and Schopenhauer's conception of the Ideas, see Christoph Asmuth, *Interpretation – Transformation: Das Platonblid bei Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher und Schopenhauer und das Legitimationsproblem der Philosophiegeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). See also Bart Vandenabeele, 'Schopenhauer

confronted with empirical objects, it is possible to view those empirical objects in a way that transcends their merely empirical characteristics. The thought would then be that aesthetic cognition requires an impersonal 'universal standpoint' through which not only the perceived object but also the self or 'I' is viewed, as it were, from nowhere. The individual object does not vanish, but is – as Robert Wicks aptly puts it – 'perceived in light of its universal significance'.[41] How this universal point of view is to be attained by creatures whose nature is essentially *willing*, which inclines them to perceive, think, and judge from their own egocentric (and even egoistic) viewpoint, remains nonetheless puzzling.

Though Schopenhauer's radical transformation of Kant's theory of disinterestedness ultimately results in an account of aesthetic experience which is perhaps unnecessarily clouded by Platonic metaphysical idiom, that does not automatically render the account as such invalid. There are at least three plausible elements in Schopenhauer's description of the experience of beauty, and each of these is a theoretical gain over Kant. First, Schopenhauer's particularly strong requirement that, in aesthetic contemplation, we temporarily lose ourselves completely in the aesthetic object may be overstated, but it is far from implausible as a characterization of (at least some genuine instances of) aesthetic experience. For, in aesthetic contemplation, we are surely taken in by the object and are temporarily immune to our environment, that is to say, to the mechanistic causal network of things, and – as Schopenhauer plausibly holds – at the same time our relation to the world is deepened and enriched. Second, his insistence that our desires, urges, needs, and wants temporarily abate in aesthetic experience equally holds for experiences we typically tend to identify as aesthetic. Considering an object from an aesthetic point of view does – at least in some cases – require, as Schopenhauer insists, that we set aside our personal needs, desires, and wants. Aesthetic perception is not merely a question of our pleasure being unrelated to the real existence of the object, as Kant maintains, for (as we have seen) this criterion does not offer any independent ground for *all* cases of the beautiful. However, aesthetic experience does involve, as Daniel Came contends, 'an attitude of reflective disengagement from all considerations of utility, which considers only what the object is "in itself"',[42] which is precisely what Schopenhauer argues. Third, Schopenhauer's defence of the cognitive value of aesthetic experience in terms of 'pure objectivity' may be metaphysically overcharged, but is definitely rich in

on Aesthetic Understanding and the Values of Art', *European Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2008): 194–98.

41 Robert Wicks, *Schopenhauer* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 98. See also Vandenabeele, 'Schopenhauer on the Values'.

42 Daniel Came, 'Disinterestedness and Objectivity', *European Journal of Philosophy* 17 (2009): 5.

phenomenological insight, and gives the lie to those who, like Nietzsche, identify Schopenhauerian disinterestedness and objectivity with the 'blessed peace of nothingness', which is supposedly 'hostile to life'. That Schopenhauer connects his (plausible) characterization of disinterested aesthetic experience with a soteriological metaphysics of life-denial and asceticism does not entail that aesthetic disinterestedness *in itself* is, as Nietzsche holds, necessarily a 'homage to ascetic ideals'.[43] As I have argued elsewhere,[44] Schopenhauer's characterization of aesthetic experience in terms of will-less and painless objectivity may indeed be closer to an intimation of the eternal tranquillity of death than to Kant's ideal of *Lebensgefühl*. Yet, contra Nietzsche, Schopenhauer's claim that the aesthetic subject's exceptionally 'pure' state of consciousness allows it to discover the deeper objective essences of the world is hardly implausible: at least *some* (intense) aesthetic experiences, in which our self-consciousness dissolves and we become immune to ulterior aims and desires, enable us to unravel universal truths about mankind and its place in the world.

III. CONCLUSION

Stripped from its idealistic metaphysics, Schopenhauer's characterization of aesthetic experience in terms of will-free objective cognition may perhaps not hold for *all* kinds of aesthetic experience but it is a plausible and perceptive characterization of at least some basic aspects of genuine instances of it. For, at least one of the reasons we value artworks such as Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, and Goya's *The Third of May 1808* is that they convey profound universal truths about the world and our place in it, and because (as Schopenhauer insists) they offer us both a release and a renewal, since they return us to something fundamental. And even if we cannot put what this something is adequately into words, the experience 'revives', 'cheers', and 'comforts' us (*WWR*, 1:197). Hence, Schopenhauer's radical transformation of Kant's analysis of disinterested pleasure results in too idealistic a theory of aesthetic will-lessness to be able to account for each and every genuine aesthetic experience. But to completely dismiss it risks dispensing with an invaluable philosophical contribution that surpasses Kant's analysis of free beauty and enables us to think through the essential features of the fabric of our consciousness and the primordial significance of aesthetic experience to human life.

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43 Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 80.
44 See Vandenabeele, 'Schopenhauer and the Objectivity of Art'.

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