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Reply to Paul Guyer

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I read with great interest and pleasure Paul Guyer's generous assessment of my paper and his careful and focused critique of my reading of the relationship between genius and taste. As he notes, we agree about a lot. I agree, first of all, that for Kant genius implies a capacity to communicate, to *present* aesthetic ideas in a work of art. I also agree that genius involves not only the imagination but also the other cognitive capacities (and I admit that I might not have been as clear on this point as I should have been).[1] However, I do not agree that for Kant genius implies the capacity to render its aesthetic ideas *universally* communicable, or that it implies a successful *exercise* of the power of pure aesthetic judgement. These are different ways of saying the same thing; it is the exercise of taste that renders the products of genius universally communicable, not merely communicable to similarly attuned geniuses and – perhaps – especially sensitive critics.

My response will have two parts. The first focuses on details of the discussion of genius and taste in the third *Critique* to demonstrate more fully the textual support for my reading. The second looks more closely at Guyer's contention that 'imagination and the power of judgement are both elements of genius', and that taste is not something external to genius.

1

Guyer suggests that I rely primarily on §50. However, my interpretation of genius arises in large part from §49, especially the identification of genius with *spirit* (*Geist*), which Kant describes as 'the animating principle in the mind' and 'the faculty for the presentation of *aesthetic ideas*' (5: 313).[2] I do not take spirit to be one of the faculties that constitute genius, but rather the term under which Kant pursues his account of the faculties that harmonize in genius. For Kant genius, as an extraordinary animation of the imagination that harmonizes with concepts, is the complex productive faculty to which he contrasts taste in §48 as a non-productive faculty for judging. There, taste is described

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as 'only the vehicle of communication and a manner, as it were, of presentation' (ibid.). For Kant, taste is insufficient to create beauty in art because it cannot produce the 'rich material' (§47, 5: 310) that is provided by genius.

Kant thus concludes at the end of §48 that 'in one would-be work of beautiful art, one can often perceive genius without taste, while in another, taste without genius' (5: 313). However, he has not yet explained exactly what it is that genius contributes to art. He has not provided an account of that original, exemplary, rich material for which taste must provide a 'vehicle of communication' to achieve artistic beauty. Thus §49, which commences immediately after the above passage, articulates what Kant takes to be peculiar to genius itself, namely the capacity to exhibit aesthetic ideas in exemplary (but not yet beautiful) works of art. That is, genius on its own can create works that *communicate,* but only to subjects with a 'similar proportion of mental powers' (5: 309). Such works, when encountered by a genius with such a similar proportion, 'awaken [him] to the feeling of his own originality', eliciting that 'unsought and unintentional' purposiveness to which Guyer refers (5: 317). However, lacking the manner of presentation provided by the discipline of taste, these works cannot communicate that purposiveness universally, and as I noted do not appear natural, but manneristic and 'neck-breaking'.

With this account of genius's contribution to art in hand, Kant then, in §50, briefly wraps up his discussion of taste and genius in fine art by referring back to his claim in §48 about 'would-be' works of art, providing his assessment of the relative importance of each to the achievement of beauty.

2

Guyer focuses on those passages in the second half of §49 that describe the state of mind characteristic of genius in the same terms as the state of mind in a judgement of beauty: 'subjective purposiveness in the free correspondence of the imagination to the lawfulness of the understanding' (5: 317–8). He claims that these passages show that genius involves both a talent of the imagination and of judgement. I argue that, while for Kant genius *involves* the power of judgement, or at least, as a talent of the productive imagination, the understanding, it does not involve a free *exercise* of judgement.

I agree with Guyer that for Kant taste is a natural gift in the sense of an endowment that is not shared equally by all. However, there are significant disanalogies between the givenness of genius and taste.

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First of all, while the absence of the power of judgement – a condition Kant calls 'stupidity' (7: 204, 210) – cannot be corrected via education, whatever capacity to judge one possesses can and must be cultivated if it is to be of any use. Now, it is clear that for Kant the power of judgement cannot be trained by rules or by rote. As he puts it, '*the power of judgement* … cannot be *instructed* (*belehrt*), but only exercised (*geübt*)' (7: 199). But this is not a claim that judgement cannot be educated or improved; it is an expression of a crucial tenet of his pedagogy. In multiple texts, Kant opposes a reliance on 'instruction' – the transmission and memorization of rules – in favour of education aimed at fostering the cultivation of the student's powers through their exercise under the critical eye of a teacher.[3] This theory lies behind Kant's claim in the appendix of the aesthetic *Critique* that there can be no *method* for instructing a budding artist. The master must rather adopt a 'manner' (5: 355) that supplements instruction and demonstration with critical supervision of the student's practice, thereby fostering the cultivation of taste and skill without 'smothering the genius' with prescribed rules or examples for mere imitation.

However, the educator is not given any advice about training the student's genius, because this is in Kant's view impossible. Genius can neither be taught to one who lacks it *nor* improved through practice or pedagogy for someone who possesses it, because it lies entirely outside the control of its subject.[4] Genius manifests as representations given to the subject – whether he or she wants them or not – and a corresponding animation of the faculties. Thus, in the *Anthropology* Kant describes genius as manifesting in 'outbursts' that the subject 'cannot explain to himself' (7: 225) and which exhibit a 'passionate vitality (*aufbrausende Lebhaftigkeit*)' that 'often needs to be moderated and limited by the propriety of taste' (7: 241).

In the above passages, and in his frequent comparisons between genius and madness, Kant describes genius as an activity of the productive imagination in relation to which the subject is *passive*. Thus the poet must 'snatch the propitious moment of the mood of his inner sense as it comes over him, in which lively and powerful images and feelings pour into him, while he behaves merely passively, so to speak. For as an old observation goes, genius is mixed with a certain dose of madness' (7: 188). By contrast, judgements of taste are free exercises of the power of judgement.[5]

Kant's descriptions of madness show the higher cognitive faculties *involved* in activities that cannot be considered successful exercises of

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those faculties. For example *Wahnsinn* ('delusion of sense') is a 'falsely inventive power of imagination' and *Wahnwitz* ('delusion of mind') is a 'deranged power of judgement' (7: 215). Furthermore the involuntary action of the productive imagination in *Wahnsinn* can produce original representations that, in a manner resembling the poetic inspiration he describes above, approach genius: '*Wahnsinn*, accompanied by affect is *madness* (*Tollheit*), whose fits, though involuntary, can often be original and which then, like poetic rapture (*furor poeticus*), border on *genius*' (7: 202). Finally, in several anthropological reflections the relationship between genius and madness is presented explicitly in terms of the presence *or absence* of taste. Thus, 'the power of judgement and taste determine the limits of genius; therefore without these genius borders on madness' (15: 361; R812), and 'genius, which borders on madness, is the strength of phantasy without the power of judgement' (15: 827; R1510).

In a sense, then, both genius and taste are gifts of nature that involve both the imagination and the understanding. But what is given in taste is a *capacity* which one can freely exercise and cultivate, or fail to, and what are given in genius are the aesthetic ideas themselves, towards which the subject is passive in ways that Kant clearly finds troubling, and which require the discipline of taste if they are to be expressed in works of artistic beauty.

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Notes

1 My invocation of the claim that genius 'is really only a talent (of the imagination)' (5: 314) may have been misleading. For Kant, the *productive* imagination necessarily involves the understanding. I take the above claim, and similar ones (e.g. 7: 224–5 and R671 15: 297) to distinguish genius as a faculty that produces original intuitions from the faculties involved in judging or comprehending them. This makes some sense of the apparently nakedly contradictory way he describes in the same text genius as 'originality of the power of imagination' (7: 172) and 'originality of the cognitive faculty' (7: 224).

2 Citations of Kant use the Akademie edition (Kant 1901–). Translations are from the following Cambridge editions: *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kant 2000). *Anthropology & Lectures on Pedagogy* (Kant 2007).

3 For example, in the *Lectures on Pedagogy*, Kant writes: 'The positive part of physical education is *culture* … Culture consists particularly in the exercise of one's mental powers' (9: 466) and 'The best way of cultivating the powers of the mind is to do everything that one wants to accomplish by oneself' (9: 476). However, only a very few people are capable of educating themselves. Thus, most require the guidance and critique of educators (9: 477). The pedagogy he develops from these observations is the subject of extensive discussion in the *Lectures* and in his anthropological writing, but it also figures in his accounts of moral pedagogy in the second *Critique* (5: 154) and the *Metaphysics of Morals* (6: 477–8), and as we'll see, a brief but important discussion of the education of would-be artists in the aesthetic *Critique*.

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4 'The author of a product that he owes to his genius does not know himself how the ideas for it come to him, and also does not have it in his power to think up such things at will or according to a plan' (5: 308).

5 We should also note that to lack taste is to be *deficient* compared to most people, 'taste deaf' to borrow Guyer's delightful phrase. But to lack genius is merely, like most people, to lack extraordinary artistic gifts. A person without taste is not analogous to a non-genius, but to someone entirely lacking in creative ability. Additionally, the fair-to-middling creative capacities of non-geniuses are, like taste, exercised at will. If I have learned how to improvise, when I sit in with a group of musicians I compose my lines intentionally.

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