

Response to my critics: In defense of Kant's aesthetic non- conceptualism

DIETMAR H. HEIDEMANN*

University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Abstract

In this article I respond to objections that Matías Oroño, Silvia del Luján di Saanza, Pedro Stepanenko and Luciana Martínez have raised against my non-conceptualist reading of Kant's aesthetics. The objections are both, substantial and instructive. I first sketch my non-conceptualist reading of Kant's doctrine of judgments of taste and then turn to what I take to be the most important criticisms that these authors have put forward. Two difficulties with a non-conceptualist reading of Kant's aesthetics seem to be central: the cognitive status of judgments of taste and the representationalist capacity of aesthetic feeling as non-conceptual mental content. I respond to these and additional objections and defend my overall non-conceptualist interpretation of Kant's aesthetics against my critics. I argue that Kant's aesthetics is highly relevant for the debate over whether or not Kant is a (non-)conceptualist.

Keywords

Kantian non-conceptualism, judgment of taste, aesthetic feeling, aesthetic experience

* Academic affiliation: University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg. Email: dietmar.heidemann@uni.lu

In his article “El (no)-conceptualismo de Kant y los juicios de gusto”¹, Matías Oroño critically discusses my paper “Kant’s Aesthetic Nonconceptualism”.² In that paper I defend a non-conceptualist reading of Kant’s aesthetics. Oroño dismisses my non-conceptualist account of judgments of taste and offers an alternative interpretation of Kant’s theory of aesthetic evaluation. In reaction to Oroño’s criticism of my paper and to his alternative account, *Con-Textos Kantianos* has published a series of articles that engage – partly critically – with Oroño’s interpretation as well as with my non-conceptual reading of Kant’s aesthetics.³ The objections Oroño raises against my reading as well as the critical discussion of my account in that series of articles are well-considered, thoughtful and challenging. Since I take them to be substantial and important for a proper understanding of Kant’s aesthetics and for his theory of cognition as such, I will, in what follows, defend my arguments against my critics. To start with, I will sketch, very briefly, though, my non-conceptualist reading of Kant’s theory of judgments of taste, then present Oroño’s objections against my reading and discuss them. I then turn to the aforementioned articles published in *Con-Textos Kantianos*, 9 especially to additional points their authors make. My aim is to show why a non-conceptualist reading of Kant’s aesthetics can be defended against their criticisms, although they raise well-justified objections that require further arguments on my part.

1. *A non-conceptualist reading of Kant’s theory of judgments of taste*

In the first *Critique* Kant still thought that it would not be possible to make aesthetics into a science as Baumgarten believed for judgments of taste rest on empirical (psychological) grounds rather than a priori principles:

The ground for this is a failed hope, held by the excellent analyst Baumgarten, of bringing the critical estimation of the beautiful under principles of reason and elevating its rules to a science. But this effort is futile. For the putative rules or criteria are merely empirical as far

¹ Oroño 2017.

² Heidemann 2016.

³ The critical discussion is introduced by Oroño (2019a). The review articles are: di Saanza (2019), Stepanenko (2019), Martínez (2019), and finally a response by Oroño (2019b).

as their sources are concerned, and can therefore never serve as a priori rules according to which our judgment of taste must be directed, rather the latter constitutes the genuine touchstone of the correctness of the former. (KrV A 21/B 35 Anm.)

This view changes dramatically in the third *Critique*, i.e., after the discovery of purposiveness as the a priori principle for reflective judgment. Now aesthetics receives the status of a 'science of taste' in the sense that aesthetic judgment estimates formal, i.e., subjective purposiveness by means of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure and hereby allows for judgments of taste. For the problem of non-conceptual content in Kant's aesthetics this turns out to be crucial. Since in order to be relevant for the problem of non-conceptualism as such, judgments of taste must exhibit cognitive quality and cannot just count as (linguistic) expressions of private aesthetic feeling (cf. KU, AA 05: 211). Judgments of taste would in fact be irrelevant for the problem of non-conceptual content if Kant would conceive them as such expressions, similar to Wittgenstein's observation that statements like 'I am in pain.' are nothing over and above the linguistic form of the expression of pain itself, namely 'ouch!'. But for Kant, judgments of taste are not to be understood as bare expressions of aesthetic feeling, e.g., like 'wow!' (in the sense of 'wow, what a beautiful sculpture'). Judgments of taste have, for Kant, cognitive quality, since they involve the working together of (universally valid) cognitive faculties, i.e., imagination and understanding (cf. KU, AA 05: 217-219). Of course, judgments of taste are not judgments of cognition and do not have objective validity. But they are cognitive judgments since they are not unregulated private exclamations of conscious aesthetic feeling.⁴ In a judgment of taste, Kant says, "we do not relate the representation by means of understanding to the object for cognition, but rather relate it by means of the imagination (perhaps combined with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure." (KU, AA 05: 203).

In Kant's aesthetics the feeling of pleasure or displeasure is about the mental state the perceiver is in rather than about the logical determination of a sensible given through concepts like in a judgment of cognition. This feeling occurs given the harmonious relation

⁴ On the important difference between *judgment of cognition* and *cognitive judgment* see below in more detail.

of understanding and imagination. In “Kant’s Aesthetic Nonconceptualism” I argue that since the aesthetic feeling is conceptually undetermined, it counts as non-conceptual content on which judgments of taste are based. Of course, from the fact that feeling of pleasure or displeasure is non-conceptual it does not follow that it is non-conceptual in the relevant cognitive sense of ultimately bringing about judgments of taste. For as the general debate on conceptualism and non-conceptualism in philosophy of mind and cognition has shown, in order for mental content to be cognitively relevant it must be representational, phenomenal and intentional. As I try to show in the paper, the feeling of pleasure as non-conceptual content in judgments of taste meets all of these three criteria. Very briefly: The feeling of pleasure is phenomenal since in the mental state of aesthetic feeling it is somehow for the subject to be in that state (see below section 2.6.). The feeling of pleasure is intentional since in that state the subject feels itself, that is, is directed toward itself: “Here the representation is related entirely to the subject, indeed to its feeling of life, under the name of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure” (KU, AA 05: 204).⁵ And most importantly, it is representational since in that state of feeling of pleasure the subject is representing the harmonious relation of understanding and imagination (see below section 2.5.). Therefore, judgments of taste are not judgments of cognition but they are cognitive. They are cognitive because they are possible only through the workings of cognitive faculties. The harmonious relation of these faculties elicits the feeling of pleasure. And the feeling of pleasure is the non-conceptual mental state on which the judgment of taste is based.

2. Oroño’s objections against the non-conceptualist reading of Kant’s theory of judgments of taste

In the following discussion of Matías Oroño’s criticism of my non-conceptualist reading of Kant’s aesthetics I focus on six objections that he raises in *El (no)-conceptualismo de Kant y los juicios de gusto*. Since Oroño confines himself to my reading of Kant’s theory of judgment of taste and does not consider the non-conceptualist

⁵ On phenomenality and intentionality of aesthetic experience cf. in more detail Turai (2020, chapter 3).

interpretation of Kant's doctrine of the aesthetic genius that I am also proposing in my paper, I shall not consider the letter either.

2.1. *Cognitive judgment and judgment of cognition*

The first important criticism of my interpretation is Oroño's (2017, pp. 95-96, et al.) objection that throughout my paper I illegitimately characterize judgments of taste as "cognitive" and that I confusingly speak of "the cognitive appreciation of the beautiful" (Heidemann 2016, p. 118). Oroño points out that judgments of taste do not count as judgments of cognition by referring to the classical place in the "Analytic of the Beautiful" (§ 1): "The judgment of taste is therefore not a cognitive judgment, hence not a logical one, but is rather aesthetic, by which is understood one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective." (KU, AA 05: 203). Further, Oroño (2017, p. 96) correctly reconstructs my argumentation that judgments of taste can only be relevant for the debate about non-conceptual content if they are *cognitive* judgments in order to then show that judgments of taste are based on non-conceptual content. Oroño finds this reasoning unconvincing since Kant clearly denies that judgments of taste can count as judgments of cognition.⁶ Now, in my paper I am not claiming that judgments of taste are judgments of cognition. Quite the contrary, my claim is that judgments of taste are relevant for the debate about non-conceptual content only if they are cognitive which does not mean that they are judgments of cognition. The correct translation of Kant's standard term "Erkenntnisurteil" in the third *Critique* is "judgment of cognition". The translation as "cognitive judgment" is inappropriate because the predicate "cognitive" only indicates – for Kant – that the judgment involves cognitive faculties such as sensibility, imagination and understanding and their working together. This is clearly the case with judgments of taste since they rest on the harmony of imagination and understanding and the (non-conceptual) feeling of pleasure. But from the fact that a judgment is cognitive it does not follow that it is a judgment of cognition, i.e., a judgment that is objective because we "relate the representation by means of understanding to the object" (KU, AA 05: 203). In particular, for judgments of cognition the principles of the pure understanding apply as their transcendental conditions, which is not the case with judgments of taste. With respect

⁶ The same objection is made by di Saanza (2019, pp. 335-339) and Martínez (2019, pp. 353-355).

to judgments of cognition it must be possible to attribute certain quantitative, qualitative, and relational, especially causal properties to the object of cognition whereby these attributions are objective only in accordance with the transcendental conditions of the possibility of cognition. Judgments of cognition are therefore the product of the subsumption of what is given in sensible intuition, or what is spatio-temporally determinable, under a general rule, the transcendental principle of cognition. This subsumption is possible only by mediation of a (transcendental or empirical) schema provided by the schematism of imagination. This is not the case with judgments of taste. Judgments of taste are not the product of conceptual determination, i.e., logical subsumption of what is given in sensible intuition under a general rule or concept, but reflective such that mediation through a schema is not required either and not even possible. Still, judgments of taste involve cognitive activity of the imagination and the understanding which qualifies them as *cognitive judgments*.⁷

In connection with this Oroño (2017, p. 96) agrees with me that cognition essentially consists in the necessary cooperation of intuition and concept. Opposed to my view, however, Oroño puts forward that although intuition cannot be reduced to concepts and vice versa, this does not implicate that sensible intuition's immediate and singular reference can do without any conceptual activity. Oroño indicates, correctly as I think, that this is the main point of disagreement between us – a point that goes, of course, beyond Kant's aesthetics since it concerns the overall question of whether or not Kant is a non-conceptualist about mental content in general. Here I cannot develop a broad discussion of that question. But I would like to emphasize that in my paper I am claiming that in Kant's transcendental philosophy the cooperation of intuition and concept is a necessary requirement for objective cognition. I am not claiming that this is the case for cognition in general, especially not for aesthetic cognition or judgments of taste. It seems clear to me,

⁷ It is not quite clear to me why in the English translation of Kant's third *Critique* "Erkenntnisurteil" has been translated mostly as "cognitive judgment" and less often as "judgment of cognition" (KU, AA 05: 279-281, 288-9). In the original one exclusively reads "Erkenntnisurteil[e]" and if I am not mistaken the context does not justify why the translation should switch between "cognitive judgment" and "judgment of cognition". For the German retranslation of "cognitive judgment" would be 'kognitives Urteil' which evidently does not mean "Erkenntnisurteil" in the technical Kantian sense. Therefore, by classifying "judgments of taste" as "cognitive judgments" I clearly indicate in my paper that "judgments of taste" are different from "judgments of cognition". Cf. Heidemann (2016, pp. 128-130). I concede, though, that for the sake of precision I should have better not used the English translation "cognitive judgment" and rather stick to "judgment of cognition" when pointing out that "judgments of taste" are not "judgments of cognition".

though, that as a matter of fact, in objective cognition the direct reference to the object through sensible intuition must be retained since otherwise it is hard to see how to individuate objects by means of judgments like in the judgment “This flower is beautiful.” The issue here is not that judgments always take conceptual or linguistic form. Judging is, for Kant, *conceptual* but prelinguistic. So, from the fact that judgments of taste are conceptual or linguistic expressions it does not follow that aesthetic cognition, too, is conceptual all the way down. I shall take this point up again further below.⁸

2.2. *Categorical determination and judgments of taste*

Oroño (2017, p. 98) also maintains that I am not explaining in what sense judgments of taste are categorically determined. I can see his point, although this is actually not what I wanted to say. A judgment like “This flower is beautiful.” can be read as a judgment of perception if we abstract from the predication “is beautiful”. In this case what I am focusing on is that there is an object in my visual field and this object is a flower. Here categories are clearly operative as Oroño's accepts. But I did not want to argue that in a judgment of taste an object (e.g., the beautiful flower) is categorically determined (cf. Heidemann 2016, pp. 124-5). For the judgment of taste is about the “feeling of pleasure and displeasure” (KU, AA 05: 209) that elicits the predication “is beautiful” through the free play of imagination and understanding. Kant is not explicit on how the free play is performed. But since it takes place in inner sense and since feeling as mental state is the object of “inner sense” (KU, AA 05: 218), the cognitive operations of the understanding must be conceived as some kind of categorical determination, although we cannot say what they look like. For the free play of imagination and understanding is not chaotic but, in some way, formally structured (cf. KU §§ 10-14) which can only be explained through the understanding being active. And the kind of activity that the understanding exercises here is categorical synthesis which is in line with Kant's general view that categories are logical functions conceived as determinations of intuition (cf. Prol. AA 4: 300, 322ff.). Clearly, there is no categorical determination or logical subsumption going on in aesthetic cognition or judgments of taste such that an object is somehow cognized like in objective cognition. But since the activity of the understanding consists

⁸ See also di Saanza (2019, p. 340) for a similar view.

essentially in synthesizing of what is given in intuition and since synthesis is possible only according to rules, i.e., categories, categories must be somehow operative in aesthetic cognition, too, although, as Kant says, “without a concept of the object” (KU, AA 05: 217). The way Kant lays this out is certainly not satisfying since he is not sufficiently clear on this important point. To me, however, it appears at least conclusive that in, e.g., aesthetic evaluation of a painting the perceiver playfully puts together structures and combines them in multiple ways such that the feeling of pleasure is occasioned under the rudimentary influence of the understanding. But this remains problematic for conceptualists and non-conceptualists alike.⁹

2.3. Communicability of judgments of taste

Another major objection against my non-conceptualist reading of Kant’s aesthetics consists in Oroño’s critique (2017, pp. 97-8) that I am misreading Kant’s conception of universal communicability. Whereas I argue that universal communicability applies to judging in general such that also judgments of taste must be universally communicable, Oroño claims that although judgments of taste must in fact be universally communicable in order to avoid scepticism, this does not mean that judgments of taste refer to objects like judgments of cognition do. For the object of a judgment of taste is a mental state, i.e., aesthetic feeling brought about through the free play of imagination and understanding. Therefore, in the case of the judgment of taste nothing is predicated about an object, e.g., a beautiful flower, and as a consequence universal communicability in judgments of cognition and judgments of taste is not the same. It is not clear to me, how this argument speaks against non-conceptualism. But maybe what Oroño has in mind is that judgments of taste are not objectively referential and in order for mental content, and by implication non-conceptual mental content, to be cognitively relevant it must be objectively referential. Since judgments of taste are not objectively referential their supposed non-conceptual content is cognitively irrelevant. As I am explicitly stating in my paper, I fully agree with Oroño that the object of a judgment of taste is the aesthetic feeling: “The feeling of pleasure or displeasure, however, cannot be objective in the same sense as a logical

⁹ This seems to be also the case for the conceptualist account of di Saanza (2019, p. 342).

cognitive judgement. For an aesthetic feeling is about the subjective state the perceiver is in, given the affection through the representation she has, rather than about the logical determination of a sensible given through concepts such as in a cognitive judgement.” (Heidemann 2016, p. 124). If this is true, especially if in a judgment of taste, no conceptual determination is operative (KU, AA 05: 217), then this seems to speak in favor of non-conceptual content that receives a specific role in aesthetic experience, i.e., the role of grounding those judgments. The problem then is for Oroño to make sense of the non-conceptual aesthetic feeling in aesthetic experience.

2.4. The universality of judgments of taste

Oroño (2017, p. 98) raises a similar objection against my understanding of universality of judgments of taste. Accordingly, Kant distinguishes between universality or universal validity of judgments of cognition and the mere pretension that judgments of taste are equally valid for everyone who is equipped with the same cognitive faculties. Here again the criticism is that I am not sufficiently clear about this difference and even confounding universal validity and pretension of universal validity. The difference is obviously a crucial one and my impression is that I did make it sufficiently clear: I not only state that “[...], both, logical cognitive judgements and judgements of taste lay claim to universality, the former in the objective sense, the latter in the subjective sense.” (Heidemann 2016, p. 126). I also specify that

[...] the subject of aesthetic evaluation is entitled to claim that the satisfaction is universal and “consequently he must believe himself to have grounds for expecting a similar pleasure of everyone” (KU, AA 05: 211). Thus judgements of taste are supposed to be universally valid. The kind of universality in play here cannot count as objective universality because aesthetic universality “cannot originate from concepts”, “for there is no transition from concepts to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure” (KU, AA 05: 211). Although it is not a private judgement and hence is valid only for the author of that judgement, a judgement of taste cannot lay claim to objective but only to “subjective universality” (KU, AA 05: 212). (Heidemann 2016, p. 131)

In my explication of that difference I am not quoting the phrase as Oroño is rightly expecting me to do, and which makes all the difference: “through the judgment of taste (on the beautiful) one ascribes [“ansinnen”] the satisfaction in an object to everyone, yet without grounding it on a concept” (KU, AA 05: 214). But I think the difference between both, objective and subjective universality is obvious in my account, especially that since Kant’s wants us to treat a judgment of taste *as if* it were objectively true and that everyone is called upon to endorse (cf. Heidemann 2016, p. 133). Here again it is not entirely clear to me how this terminological issue affects my argument for Kant’s aesthetic non-conceptualism since that judgments of taste are not objectively universal does not imply by itself that they are conceptual all the way down. For as I shall show further below subjective universality is compatible with non-conceptual content being representational.

2.5. Representation and aesthetic feeling

A highly questionable aspect of my non-conceptualist interpretation is, according to Oroño (2017, pp. 99-100), my claim that judgments of taste, or the feeling of pleasure as I would prefer, is representational. As mentioned in section 1 above, I define three criteria that mental content must meet in order to be cognitively relevant. The crucial and most challenging criterion is that mental content must be representational, as both of us agree. Oroño objects that in contrast to my claim judgments of taste, although involving representations, are not representational, more precisely do not represent the harmony of imagination and understanding. For the harmony is the ground of the feeling of pleasure but the feeling itself does not *represent* the harmony. Therefore, even if it were true that the feeling of pleasure is not conceptual, it cannot count as representation of the harmony and therefore my argument for the representational character of aesthetic feeling and its non-conceptuality does not go through.¹⁰ I would like to respond to this important point in two ways: First, from the fact the harmony of the faculties is the ground of aesthetic feeling it does not follow, at least not conceptually, that the aesthetic feeling cannot represent the harmony. As I see it, ‘ground’ can only signify that it brings about the

¹⁰ For a similar objection see di Saanza (2019, p. 340).

feeling. The 'aesthetic feeling' is then cognitively related to its ground in inner sense such that it would not have arisen if the harmony would not have been occasioned. The ground is, of course, different from its effect, here the feeling, nonetheless this does not seem to imply that the effected feeling is only a receptive mental occurrence that is somehow related to its ground. It is the special character and the cognitive role of the feeling that explains why it is representational with respect to harmony even though the latter is its ground. This is obvious from my second response: With respect to the representational character of feeling as non-conceptual content, the crucial point is that we only know about the harmony of the faculties because of the feeling of pleasure. By being conscious of or experiencing pleasure we are automatically (maybe unconsciously) aware of that harmony as its ground. The absence of the ground (harmony) implicates the absence of the effect (feeling). But why is feeling representational? In addition to the reasons that I have presented in my paper (Heidemann 2016, pp. 128-130), I would like to give the following specification. The point of dispute here is not that feeling is mental content that we can be aware of. The crucial question rather is whether feeling as (non-conceptual) mental content is representational (with respect to harmony). In contemporary philosophy and specifically in the debate over non-conceptualism in philosophy of mind and cognition it has been widely accepted that mental content is representational if it has accuracy conditions, i.e., it must be possible to distinguish between an accurate and an inaccurate representation of the mental content in question. Is this the case with respect to feeling? At first glance it isn't, since feelings do not have accuracy (or even truth) conditions. In Kant's aesthetics, however, this is different. For here the feeling of pleasure does have such conditions for Kant specifies that aesthetic feeling only occurs under the condition of the harmony of the faculties. Again, Kant is not specific about what the harmony itself exactly looks like since it is not conceptually determined in any objective sense, although the understanding is operative in the free play. This is also the reason for why the representation of the aesthetic feeling in inner sense is subjective rather than objective like in judgments of cognition. I therefore hold onto my claim that aesthetic feeling is non-conceptual mental content that is capable of representing its ground, i.e., the harmony of the faculty of imagination and understanding, because as mental content it has relevant accuracy conditions since it obviously makes a difference for the awareness of aesthetic feeling whether the faculties are in harmony or not. That accuracy conditions apply here is made possible through the

faculty universalism, i.e., Kant's view that all humans share the same cognitive faculties in the same way.

2.6. First person experience and aesthetic evaluation

In my non-conceptualist reading of Kant's aesthetics, I make the case that for Kant aesthetic experience is essentially dependent on the first-person-perspective such that in order to aesthetically evaluate a work of art it is the evaluating, judging person who must have first-hand experience of the work that he or she judges. Thus, in aesthetic evaluation the judging person cannot rely on heteronomous sources, e.g., reports by third persons, but must itself experience the work. Furthermore, if aesthetic evaluation depends on the first-person standpoint it cannot be carried out by conceptual or logical proof which is by definition independent of any individual perspective. This, too, I argue, supports my non-conceptualist reading since phenomenal experience of one's own state of mind like aesthetic feeling cannot be conceptually described and therefore is non-conceptual. Oroño dismisses this reasoning because the first-person perspective is insufficient for evidencing non-conceptual content, not least because the judgment of taste is an expression of a feeling and does not represent an object. In section 2.5. I have indicated why I think aesthetic feeling is in fact (subjectively) representational. Along these lines I would also like to respond to this objection. To start with, Kant clearly says that aesthetic experience cannot rely on "the approval of others" and "that what has pleased others can never serve as the ground of an aesthetic judgment." (KU, AA 05: 284) Aesthetic experience must draw on first-person-experience. In order to illustrate this Kant makes use of a telling analogy:

Someone may list all the ingredients of a dish for me, and remark about each one that it is otherwise agreeable to me, and moreover even rightly praise the healthiness of this food; yet I am deaf to all these grounds, I try the dish with my tongue and my palate, and on that basis (not on the basis of general principles) do I make my judgment. (KU, AA 05: 285; Kant's emphasis)

The point Kant makes here is very similar to Thomas Nagel's argument in *What is it like to be a bat?* In that article Nagel develops an argument for the irreducibility of phenomenal experience, of so-called qualia-consciousness that we experience when we, e.g., perceive the specific red colour of a sunset or the unique taste of the sweetness of a candy. The argument consists of three steps: First Nagel specifies two features of consciousness: The one is that "an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is [...] something it is like *for* that organism". (Nagel 1974, p. 436) This is what Nagel calls the "subjective character of experience". (Nagel 1974, p. 436) The reason why conscious experience is subjective can be explained by the second feature: "every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view". (Nagel 1974, p. 437) Therefore, a physicalist theory cannot explain the subjectivity of consciousness since it is by definition an objective theory that is completely detached from a single point of view. To put it in another way: Conscious experience like seeing the red colour or tasting the candy is something that I cannot know objectively, since it is something that I can know exclusively from my own case, without being able to conceptualise it. The second step of the argument tries to show that the subjectivity of consciousness is undeniably a fact about what it is like to be an organism, e.g. a bat. To this end Nagel takes it for granted that bats have phenomenal experiences. He invites us to imagine what it is like to be a bat, a creature which experiences the world by echolocation. Of course, Nagel argues, we can imagine having poor vision and spending the day hanging upside down by ones feet in an attic. But whether we can imagine that from our human perspective is not the question. What we want to know is what it is like for a bat to be a bat. To get to know that is not possible for us because we cannot take up a bat's subjective conscious experience since our imagining being a bat is tied to our single human points of view and can never reach what it is like for the bat itself. Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge the *fact* that bats have subjective conscious experience though human imagination and concepts are not able to grasp exactly what it is like to be a bat for a bat. In the third step of the argument Nagel depicts the position he holds with regard to facts. He calls it "realism about the subjective domain", a form of realism that acknowledges "the existence of facts beyond the reach of human concepts" (Nagel 1974, p. 441). This conception of realism is specifically a metaphysical realism, according to which reality does not coincide with what

we are able to think is real or grasp conceptually. Metaphysical realism rather is the view that reality goes beyond of what we can describe. There is no doubt for Nagel that there are facts which humans never will possess the requisite concepts to represent. Kant clearly rejects metaphysical, or in his own terms, transcendental realism. But Kant would clearly acknowledge this reasoning with respect to subjective aesthetic experience as non-conceptual. As a matter of fact, aesthetic experience is, for Kant, first-person experience since there are no conceptual tools that make it possible to describe that experience. The experience (aesthetic feeling) is therefore non-conceptual although it is factual for it is somehow for the subject of that experience to be in the mental state of aesthetic feeling, a state that is a subjective mental fact beyond conceptual grasp. Kant's insistence on first-person aesthetic experience therefore supports my non-conceptualist reading of his aesthetics.

3. *Further objections against the non-conceptualist reading of Kant's aesthetics*

In addition to the objections raised by Oroño I will, in what follows, discuss some of the criticisms of my non-conceptualist reading of Kant's aesthetics that have been put forward in the aforementioned series of articles published in *Con-Textos Kantianos*, 9. All of those criticisms are very considerate and helpful. Here I do not have the space to respond to all of them in detail and will restrict myself to those objections that I take to be most threatening for my account. This does not mean that the objections I am not considering in this response in detail are irrelevant.

3.1. *Concept, intuition and non-conceptual representation*

In his contribution "La persistencia de los conceptos. Un comentario sobre una objeción de Matías Oroño a Dietmar Heidemann" Pedro Stepanenko joins and elaborates on Oroño's critique that from irreducibility of intuitions to concepts non-conceptualism does not follow, to put it differently, from the acknowledged fact that intuition qua *repraesentatio singularis* cannot be reduced to concept qua *repraesentatio generalis* it cannot be inferred that intuition is a cognitive mode that allows for non-conceptual

representation of objects. In his discussion Stepanenko (2019, p. 346), first, very helpfully reconsiders the recent debate on Kant and non-conceptualism, and points to the difficulty that Kantian (non-)conceptualism might not stand for what the contemporary (analytic) debate conceives as (non-)conceptualism.¹¹ Now like Oroño, Stepanenko contends that it is the nature of intuition that ultimately justifies why on the judgmental level non-conceptual mental content is conserved. For this reason, there arises a conflict in my reading, he argues, between the claim that non-conceptual content is cognitively relevant only if it can be preserved on the judgmental level, and the view that intuition is irreducible to concepts, hence to any judgmental structure. In this context he makes the additional point that in order to substantiate this view I should have presented a definition of mental content. It is in fact the understanding of mental content that he considers to be at the heart of the problem (Stepanenko 2019, pp. 346-7).

In response to these astute considerations, I would like to point out that I am not claiming that since intuition cannot be reduced to concept, Kant must count as a non-conceptualist. This would be a much too simple argument. The crucial point is that intuition qua non-conceptual content can only be cognitively relevant if it meets a certain set of criteria that warrant how it can have justificatory *force*. As argued above, the most important one is the condition that non-conceptual content must be representational. With respect to this requirement in particular, Stepanenko reminds us of the famous *dictum* of the first *Critique*: “Thought without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.” (KrV, A 51/B 75). In a nutshell, it is from this dictum that it gets clear that intuitions without concepts cannot refer to anything at all.

It seems to me that this is not correct. Let's briefly look at how Kant comes to argue that intuition and concept are different in kind and why their difference implies that intuition is representational. From Kant's essay *Concerning the Ultimate Foundation of the Distinction of the Directions in Space* (1768) it is evident that in order to claim that thoughts without content are empty, and intuitions without concepts are blind, one must show the ultimate difference between intuition and concept. The crucial argument here is that given incongruent counterparts it is not the case, as Leibniz thought, that a complete

¹¹ I am glad that Stepanenko mentions this concern. I fully agree with him that there is the danger of confounding traditions. A next step of the debate might therefore consist in a substantial self-reflexive discussion about similarities and differences between the traditions in play.

conceptual description of objects leads to the numerical identity of these objects if the descriptions are identical. This is not true, according to Kant, since in intuition incongruent counterparts remain numerically distinct objects as spatial representation (intuition) shows. I cannot discuss Kant's argument here at length. But since he comes back to it later at several other places when clarifying the difference between intuition and concept (like in *De mundi, Prolegomena*) this seems to be still a relevant move for him. Why is it? Because it shows that it is possible to represent objects merely on the basis of intuition without concepts since as incongruent counterparts show we can still refer to numerically distinct objects and refer to them in cognitively relevant ways. The reason for this is, as Kant demonstrates later in his (semi-)critical works, that intuition is *repraesentatio singularis* rather than *generalis*. This does not show that objective cognition is possible solely through sensible intuition but that we can represent and numerically distinguish objects in space (whether their position in space is right- or left-handed etc.) independently of the use of concepts. For conceptual descriptions do not suffice to distinguish incongruent counterparts in space. Therefore, intuition as *repraesentatio singularis* is, in principle, representational, as I argue in my paper. This needs, of course, to be referred to the context of Kant's aesthetics but it seems to me that Stepanenko's intellectualist account of Kant's distinction between intuition and concept does not hold.

3.2. *Non-conceptual content and the genius*

In her contribution: "Kant y el no conceptualismo" Luciana Martínez takes up various criticisms already raised by Oroño such as the objection that judgments of taste are not cognitive or do have cognitive value. There are two points assessed by Martínez that I would like to consider here a little further. Martínez (2019, pp. 355, 358) objects that I am not explaining the criteria for non-conceptual content that I define. I accept this criticism but would just like to hint at the general debate on non-conceptual content where these criteria have been established. Although this is a fair enough point, I cannot develop the entire arguments for why these criteria apply.¹² The second important criticism Martínez (2019, pp. 353-355) makes is that in my paper I do not integrate my claims about the

¹² It cannot be ruled out that these criteria need to be revised.

genius' non-conceptual making of artwork into my overall argument. More specifically I do not relate them to the doctrine of the judgment of taste and ignore its systematic function within Kant's aesthetics. I am not sure whether this is the case. It seems to me that in my paper I discuss the genius' non-conceptualism to quite some extent, especially with respect to the question whether the way of production of art by the genius entails non-conceptual elements or even is non-conceptual all the way down. With respect to aesthetic ideas this is certainly the case because Kant repeatedly emphasizes aesthetic ideas exceed any conceptual grasping. He even says that an "aesthetic idea" is

that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible. One readily sees that it is the counterpart (pendant) of an idea of reason, which is, conversely, a concept to which no intuition (representation of the imagination) can be adequate. (KU, AA 05: 314)

I am not taking Kant's doctrine of the aesthetic genius to stand for his non-conceptualism in any positive sense. This is because the genius' cognitive behavior does not result in any objective cognition discursive cognizers could have. This doctrine is therefore merely complementary to Kant's doctrine of the judgment of taste. On the other hand, Martínez does not provide any concrete arguments against my view that because aesthetic ideas are not discursive or linguistically expressible in ordinary judgments like judgments of taste, they are non-conceptual. To my claim that the alleged genius' cognition lays claim to non-conceptual mental content discursive cognizers cannot have, she does not respond in detail. – As I said before, I take the objections raised by the authors considered here to be very enlightening and serious threads to my non-conceptual reading of Kant's aesthetics. But what I am missing in all of their contributions is a conclusive explication of why Kant repeatedly underscores (cf. KU, §§ 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, 22) that

judgments of taste are *without concept* if it is true, as they believe, that judgments of taste are conceptual whatsoever.¹³

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