Aesthetics
Larissa Berger

10 On the Subjective, Beauty and Artificial Intelligence: A Kantian Approach

Abstract: The subjective or phenomenal character of experience has been famously captured by Thomas Nagel’s question “What is it like to be an x?”. At first glance, Kant seems to care little about such ‘what is it like’ questions. His philosophy does not seem to be concerned with phenomenal character. However, I will argue that this picture falls short of Kant’s account of beauty. For Kant, an adequate account of pleasure in general and pleasure in the beautiful in particular must refer to phenomenal character. Pleasure cannot be understood but needs to be felt. Since beauty is constituted by a specific feeling of pleasure, beauty can only be grasped by creatures with the ability to feel. Despite new achievements in affective computing, AI is not able to feel. Hence, the realm of beauty is foreclosed to AI.

In 1974, Thomas Nagel introduced the famous question “What is it like to be an x?” into philosophy of mind. Nagel argues that there is a subjective point of view, which is inaccessible from the perspective of physics or natural science. The existence of a subjective point of view, together with the phenomenal character of experience that goes along with it, provides a promising argument against the existence of strong Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI cannot occupy a subjective point of view, let alone the human-specific point of view. One crucial thing AI is missing is the ability to have mental states with phenomenal character, where the latter is essential to human experiences.

All of this might seem rather detached from Kant’s philosophy. At first glance, Kant seems to care little about what Nagel calls the subjective point of view, or ‘what-it-is-likeness.’ I will, however, show that a closer look at Kant’s aesthetics reveals that at least one part of Kant’s philosophy relies and depends on ‘what-it-is-likeness:’ his account of beauty. More precisely, I will argue that Kant’s argument in the Analytic of the Beautiful depends on the aesthetic pleasure’s phenomenal character of disinterestedness. This will be the basis to argue that the realm of beauty, understood in Kantian terms, is foreclosed to AI.

I will proceed as follows: First, I will briefly sketch Kant’s understanding of the subjective. Second, I will introduce Nagel’s notion of the subjective, which is quite distinct from Kant’s usage of this term. Third, I will argue that, nonetheless,
not only Kant’s understanding of pleasure in general, but also his notion of the pleasure in the beautiful, depend on the phenomenal character of pleasure. Finally, I will put forward an argument for the thesis that AI is foreclosed from the Kantian realm of beauty.

1 Kant’s Notion of the Subjective

The term ‘subjective’ has come to carry with it a certain flavor of arbitrariness. What is subjective is merely valid for the individual subject and bound to her idiosyncratic point of view. Although something along these lines can be found in Kant, his usage of this term is multifaceted. For our present purposes, I submit to distinguish four different meanings of ‘subjective’: origins in the subject (S₁), merely private validity (S₂), validity for all judging subjects (S₃), and uselessness for cognition (S₄).

In its first and broadest meaning (S₁) the term ‘subjective’ signifies that something originates in, or relates to, the subject. For instance, Kant says that the “merely subjective in the representation of an object” is that which “constitutes its relation to the subject” (KU, AA 05: 188). Thus, “space and time are nothing but subjective forms of our sensory intuition” (Progress, AA 20: 268).

S₁ Something is subjective iff it relates to, or originates in, the subject.

In this broad sense, the term ‘subjective’ is applied to transcendental notions, such as space and time, as well as empirical notions, such as sensations (Empfindungen).

A second sense of the subjective (S₂) refers to the validity of judgments or representations. Whereas objective validity is coextensive with universal validity – “[o]bjective validity and necessary universal validity (for everyone) are [. . .] interchangeable concepts” (Prol., AA 04: 209) –, (merely) subjective validity signifies

As a matter of fact, there are further aspects of the meaning of ‘subjective.’ For instance, in the context of the third Critique one might think of the subjective principle of reflective judgment. In the ethical context, the “incentive [Triebfeder]” by which “is understood the subjective determining ground of the will” (KpV, AA 05: 72) comes to mind, but also maxims being “the subjective principle of volition” (GMS, AA 04: 400 fn.) and “the subjective principle of acting” (GMS, AA 04: 420 fn.).

2 See also Progress, AA 20: 267; KU, AA 05: 188 f.
3 See: “Sensation (in this case external) likewise expresses the merely subjective aspect of our representations of things outside us” (KU, AA 05: 189).
private validity." It is this notion of the subjective in Kant which comes closest to the contemporary meaning in terms of arbitrariness.

S2 Judgments (or representations) are merely subjectively valid iff they have only private validity.

In the Prolegomena Kant applies this sense of ‘subjective’ to judgments of perception: “Empirical judgments, insofar as they have objective validity, are judgments of experience; those, however, that are only subjectively valid I call mere judgments of perception.” (Prol., AA 04: 298) Judgments of experience are universally valid because they refer to the object as an intersubjectively accessible reference point. On the contrary, judgments that have a reference point within the judging subject are merely subjectively valid, i.e., they have merely private validity. This latter claim, however, is abandoned in the third Critique, where Kant introduces the differentiation between objective and subjective universality of judgments. With this notion of subjective universality he establishes a third sense of ‘subjective’ (S3). In this context, objective universality concerns the sphere of objects to be judged – objectively universal judgments have the form “All S are P”. Instead, subjective universality concerns the “sphere of those who judge” (KU, AA 05: 215) – subjectively universal judgments are valid for every judging subject (every human being). Hence, this is a third sense of ‘subjective’ in Kant:

S3 A judgment has subjective universality iff it is valid for all judging subjects.

Note that S3 (subjective universality) is incompatible with S2 (merely private validity). Thus, these two senses of ‘subjective’ mark off a shift in thought between the Prolegomena and the third Critique.

S3 is not the only sense of the subjective that we find in the third Critique. It is in this work that Kant uses this term most frequently. For instance, Kant also

4 See for instance KrV: A820/B 849; KU, AA 05: 217 & 338. – See also Kant’s remarks in On Having an Opinion, Knowing, and Believing, for instance: “Subjective sufficiency is called conviction (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty (for everyone).” (KrV: A 822/B850).
5 See: “for there would be no reason why other judgments necessarily would have to agree with mine, if there were not the unity of the object – an object to which they all refer, with which they all agree, and, for that reason, also must all harmonize among themselves.” (Prol., AA 04: 298).
6 See KU, AA 05: 214 f.
employs ‘subjective’ \( (S_4) \) to signify that something “does not serve for any cognition at all” (KU, AA 05: 206). Thus, the feeling of pleasure is merely subjective, whereas sensations \( (\text{Empfindungen}) \), which provide the material for cognition, are “objective representation[s] of the senses” (KU, AA 05: 206).\(^7\)

\( S_4 \) A representation is subjective if it cannot serve for cognition.\(^8\)

Indeed, according to this definition, the feelings of pleasure and displeasure are the only subjective representations of which Kant conceives. As Kant puts it: “the subjective aspect \( [\text{dasjenige Subjektive}] \) in a representation which cannot become an element of cognition at all is the pleasure or displeasure connected with it; for through this I cognize nothing in the object of the representation, although it can well be the effect of some cognition or other” (KU, AA 05: 189).

The common core of \( S_{1-4} \) is that the subjective refers to the subject or, more precisely, the human being. Note that one and the same thing can be subjective in one sense and objective in another. For instance, the \textit{a priori} forms of intuition are subjective in that they originate in the subject \( (S_1) \), but they are objective in that they serve for the cognition of objects \( (S_4) \); in addition, they have objective validity \( (S_2) \). Sensations are subjective in that they have merely private validity \( (S_2) \), but they are objective in that they can serve for cognition \( (S_4) \). For our purposes, it is important to see that none of Kant’s notions of the subjective explicitly refers to the phenomenal character of experience.

\section*{2 Nagel’s Notion of the Subjective}

A seminal contemporary conception of the subjective was famously suggested by Thomas Nagel in his paper ‘\textit{What is it Like to Be a Bat?}’. It is a fundamental critique both of reductionism (in its different variants) and functionalism or, at least, it calls attention to the limits of these positions. Nagel’s argument is based on the notion of the \textit{subjective}, which is contrasted with the \textit{objective} as associated with the realm of physics. Nagel links the subjective to the notion of

\(^7\) In \textit{Progress} Kant makes use of a broader sense of the subjective. Here, everything that “can provide no knowledge of the object” and “cannot even be counted as knowledge of objects at all” is subjective (Progress, AA 20: 268 f.). Since sensations “e.g. of bodies in light as color, in sound as tones, or in taste as sour” alone do not amount to knowledge of the object, they “remain merely subjective” (Progress, AA 20: 268 f.).

\(^8\) This sense of the subjective is also contained in Kant’s notion of the aesthetic judgment’s subjective determining ground (see KU, AA 05: 203 f.).
experience and defines the “subjective character of experience” (Nagel 1974, pp. 436 & 441) in terms of ‘what-it-is-likeness’ or phenomenal character:

the fact that an organism has conscious experience at all means, basically, that there is something it is like to be that organism. [. . .] But fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism – something it is like for the organism. We may call this the subjective character of experience.

(Nagel 1974, p. 436)

Consciousness is inextricably (‘if and only if’) linked to ‘what-it-is-likeness’: There is no conscious mental state without something it is like to be in that state, and no ‘what-it-is-likeness’ without some kind of consciousness. Because of their ‘what-it-is-likeness’ conscious mental states are subjective or, more precisely, ‘what-it-is-likeness’ is nothing but the ‘subjective character of experience.’ Although Nagel himself does not employ the term ‘qualia,’ we may use it, understood as “the introspectively accessible, phenomenal aspects of our mental lives” (Tye 2017, par. 1), to refer to ‘what-it-is-likeness.’

9 Nagel holds that experiences with phenomenal features or ‘what-it-is-likeness’ are connected with “a single point of view” (Nagel 1974, p. 437), viz., a subject-specific point of view. The latter is not true for what is objective.10 This does not mean that an objective, physical theory is free from any point of view whatsoever. Whereas the subjective character of experience is bound to the “internal view” or view from inside, the objective is connected to (or aims at) an “external view” or view from outside (Nagel 1979, p. 207). The view from outside is constituted by a transcendence of all particular points of view (of individuals as well as species) – it is a view “from nowhere in particular” (Nagel 1979, p. 208).

One could suspect that the subjective or internal point of view is intimate to each individual and, therefore, not accessible to other individuals. And it seems reasonable that our first grasp of the phenomenal character of experience is bound to this first-person or individual point of view. To have any idea of what it is like to see red, I need to see something red myself in the first place. In this respect, there is a certain priority of the individual point of view. Yet,

9 See also Chalmers: “A number of alternative terms and phrases pick out approximately the same class of phenomena as ‘consciousness’ in its central sense. These include ‘experience,’ ‘qualia,’ ‘phenomenology,’ ‘phenomenal,’ ‘subjective experience,’ and ‘what it is like.’” (Chalmers 1996, p. 6). Nagel himself uses a number of different terms to denote ‘what-it-is-likeness,’ including “phenomenological facts” (Nagel 1974, p. 442), “phenomenal features of experience” (Nagel 1974, p. 437), and “quality” of “experience” (Nagel 1974, p. 442).

10 Nagel states: “every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view, and it seems inevitable that an objective, physical theory will abandon that point of view” (Nagel 1974, p. 437).
when Nagel refers to the subjective as opposed to the objective, he refers to the broader human point of view or, more generally, to “species-specific points of view” (Nagel 1974, p. 444). As Nagel writes: “I am not adverting here to the alleged privacy of experience to its possessor. The point of view in question is not one accessible only to a single individual. Rather it is a type.” (Nagel 1974, p. 441) In this respect, Nagel’s subjective point of view is intersubjective (in terms of the members of a certain species) and yet not objective. For, what is objective must be available not only to the members of a certain species but must be accessible from a point of view beyond the boundaries of any species whatsoever (presupposing an adequate level of intelligence). Negatively speaking, the objective point of view is characterized by “externality or detachment” (Nagel 1979, p. 208).

The question arises of how an individual can occupy this broader human-specific though subjective point of view. Two things are required: First, one can only occupy the point of view of creatures sufficiently similar to oneself. To have an idea of what it is like for humans to see red, one needs to have the visual system of humans or, at least, a visual system that is sufficiently similar. Conversely, I cannot occupy the point of view of someone whose visual system is not sufficiently similar to mine (e.g., a deaf and blind person). The second requirement to occupy the broader human-specific point of view is imagination. By imagining what it is like to see red for other people, I leave my individual point of view behind in favor of a species-specific, but still experiential point of view. Such imagining could proceed in either of two ways:

To imagine something perceptually, we put ourselves in a conscious state resembling the state we would be in if we perceived it. To imagine something sympathetically, we put ourselves in a conscious state resembling the thing itself. (This method can be used only to imagine mental events and states – our own or another’s.) (Nagel 1974, p. 446 fn. 11)

We can imagine what it is like to perceive and what it is like to feel for somebody else. In both cases, “[o]ur own experience provides the basic material for our imagination” (Nagel 1974, p. 439). This confirms our assumed priority of the individual point of view. Note that the subjective standpoint is “beyond the reach of

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11 See the following example: “A Martian scientist with no understanding of visual perception could understand the rainbow, or lightning, or clouds as physical phenomena, though he would never be able to understand the human concepts of rainbow, lightning, or cloud, or the place these things occupy in our phenomenal world.” (Nagel 1974, 443).
13 See Nagel 1974, p. 440.
14 Nagel mentions a third kind of imagination, viz., “symbolic imagination” (Nagel 1974, p. 446 fn. 11), but does not expand on this notion.
human concepts” (Nagel 1974, p. 441). It cannot be put into propositions which could be true or false. Thus, the subjective standpoint cannot be occupied by applying rules but only by the power of our imagination.

Two clarifications are called for. First, Nagel’s distinction between the subjective and the objective point of view might suggest that both are strictly separated categories. Yet, the two are connected via a continuum between the individual point of view on one side and the ‘view from nowhere in particular’ on the other. Second, one might be tempted to think that the individual first-person point of view falls short in Nagel’s account. As Kriegel and Zahavi have emphasized, “[w]hat-it-is-like-ness is properly speaking what-it-is-like-for-me-ness” (Zahavi/Kriegel 2016, p. 36). On their account, “experiential for-me-ness is [. . .] an experiential feature of all phenomenal episodes that remains constant across them and constitutes the subjectivity of experience” (Zahavi/Kriegel 2016, p. 39). As I see it, Nagel is forced to deny neither such ‘for-me-ness’ nor its supposed constitutional function for experience. It is simply not his focus.

We can now formulate Nagel’s notion of the subjective (SN) as follows:

\[ S_N \text{ A mental state is subjective iff it is endowed with phenomenal character} \]
\[ ('what-it-is-likeness') \text{ and bound to a particular (individual or species-specific) point of view.} \]

This formulation suggests that ‘having phenomenal character’ and ‘being bound to the individual or species-specific point of view’ amount to separate conditions. Nagel writes that “every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view” (Nagel 1974, p. 437, my emphasis). So, ‘having a phenomenal character’, at least, implies ‘being bound to a single point of view.’ But is there a more precise determination of this relation? We shall have a look at the following quote:

the concepts and ideas we employ in thinking about the external world are initially applied from a point of view that involves our perceptual apparatus, they are used by us to refer to things beyond themselves – toward which we have the phenomenal point of view.

(Nagel 1974, p. 444)

15 See Nagel 1974, p. 441. See also Walter 2006, p. 13 fn. 4.
17 For a similar claim see Rinofner-Kreidl 2004. Rinofner-Kreidl differentiates between two kinds of subjectivity: subjectivity in terms of the phenomenal first-person perspective, which is a constituent of experience, and subjectivity in terms of a particular perspective on certain contents or objects. Only the latter can be overcome to reach the more objective perspective of physics; the former is in principle invincible.
The first possibility to understand the subjective point of view is in terms of the human-specific basis of the different phenomenal experiences, e.g., our perceptual capacities. For, as Nagel notes, the human-specific ‘point of view . . . involves our perceptual apparatus.’ A second possibility would be that the subjective point of view is nothing but the total of experiences with phenomenal character. Therefore, one might argue, Nagel calls this viewpoint the ‘phenomenal point of view.’ In other words, in this reading the species-specific point of view consists in the “phenomenal world” of a certain species (Nagel 1974, p. 443). There might be a third possibility. Here, the subjective point of view would encompass more than phenomenal character – namely, for instance, “the narrow range of a human scale in space, time, and quantity” (Nagel 1979, p. 206), intersubjective values etc. Thus, the species-specific point of view would refer to everything that is somehow endowed with intersubjectivity but cannot be extended to other species. I am not sure which of these pictures best captures Nagel’s conception of the subjective point of view since his own formulations remain ambiguous. In what follows, I will ask separately whether the Kantian conceptions of pleasure and beauty refer to a phenomenal character and the subjective point of view. Whereas for Nagel both might amount to the same thing or be inextricably linked, this might not be the case with Kant.

3 Kant, the Subjective and Pleasure in the Beautiful

Is the pleasure in the beautiful subjective in Nagel’s sense (SN)? In other words: Is the Kantian pleasure in the beautiful endowed with a phenomenal character, and is it bound to the subjective (individual or species-specific) point of view? To answer these questions, we shall first have a look at Kant’s general notion of pleasure.

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18 Nagel’s question ‘What is it like to be an x?’ has been transferred to Kant’s conception of rational beings by Birgit Recki (2004). Recki also focuses on Kant’s theory of feelings (Gefühle). Her concern, however, is with the ‘what’ in ‘what it is like.’ My concern is rather with the question of whether Kant’s notion of pleasure comprises ‘what-it-is-likeness’ in the first place.
3.1 Pleasure in General

Pleasure, for Kant, is subjective in the S4-sense: it cannot serve for cognition. This does not imply, however, that all kinds of pleasure are merely private or have merely private validity (S2). Rather, the pleasure in the beautiful and the pleasure in the good are intersubjectively valid and, at least, the former can serve as the determining ground for subjectively universal judgments (S3). From a contemporary point of view, it might seem obvious that feelings are paradigmatic cases of phenomenal states.\footnote{See for instance Walter 2006, p. 14.} It is by no means obvious, however, that for Kant, too, the feeling of pleasure is endowed with phenomenal character (S\textsubscript{N}).

One might assume that Kant had a \textit{functional understanding of pleasure}. Following Levin, “functionalist theories take the identity of a mental state to be determined by its causal relations to sensory stimulations, other mental states, and behavior” (Levin 2018, par. 3).\footnote{Nagel emphasizes that the subjective character of experience “is not analyzable in terms of any explanatory system of functional states, or intentional states, since these could be ascribed to robots or automata that behaved like people though they experienced nothing” (Nagel 1974, p. 436). Still, a functionalist account of pleasure could be complemented by a phenomenal understanding of the latter. So, even if Kant defined pleasure in functionalist terms, he could also hold that pleasure has a subjective character.} At first glance, Kant’s definition of pleasure in § 10 of the \textit{third Critique} seems to fit well with such a functionalist picture:

\begin{quote}
The consciousness of the causality of a representation with respect to the state of the subject, for maintaining it in that state, can here designate in general what is called pleasure; in contrast to which displeasure is that representation that contains the ground for determining the state of the representations to their own opposite (hindering or getting rid of them).
\end{quote}

(KU, AA 05: 220)

A similar picture of pleasure is evoked in the following passage of the \textit{First Introduction}:

\begin{quote}
Pleasure is a state of the mind in which a representation is in agreement with itself, as a ground, either merely for preserving this state itself (for the state of the powers of the mind reciprocally promoting each other in a representation preserves itself), or for producing its object.
\end{quote}

(EEKU, AA 20: 230 f.)

These two passages allow for the following definition of ‘pleasure’: A \textit{mental state counts as pleasure iff it has a representation as its causal input and either}
its own preservation or the production of its object as its causal output. If this functional definition were complete, pleasure would be objective in Nagel’s understanding: It could be fully understood from a vast variety of standpoints or, rather, from nowhere in particular.

It is striking that both definitions cited above do not include phenomenal character or something along these lines. With regard to the definition from § 10, Guyer emphasizes:21

There is no suggestion here [in KU, AA 05: 220] that there is a specific way that it always feels to be in one of these states or the other, that there is a specific, always identical way the disposition to continue in one’s current state feels and a particular, likewise always identical way the disposition to alter one’s state feels.22 (Guyer 2018, p. 157)

This diagnosis leads Guyer to abandon the “phenomenological account of pleasure and pain” in favor of a “dispositional [. . .] account of pleasure and pain” (Guyer 2018, p. 162). On that account, which is quite in line with the functional definition sketched above, “pleasure just consists in the disposition to remain in the state one finds pleasing” (Guyer 2018, p. 149). But is such a functionalist interpretation of the Kantian concept of pleasure adequate? Does Kant really deny any phenomenal understanding of pleasure? I do not think so. On the contrary, I submit, Kant is well aware that pleasure has a phenomenal character and that it is, first and foremost, characterized by the latter.

The most explicit evidence for this thesis is found in a remark from the First Introduction. It follows right after the definition of pleasure:

It can be readily seen here that pleasure or displeasure, since they are not kinds of cognition, cannot be explained by themselves at all, and are felt, not understood; hence they can be only inadequately explained through the influence that a representation has on the activity of the powers of the mind by means of this feeling.

(EEKU, AA 20: 231 f., my emphasis)

21 See also Zinkin: “Kant’s definition of pleasure is also not phenomenological. [. . .] he does not define pleasure in terms of how it feels, but rather as a certain kind of consciousness.” (Zinkin 2012, p. 435).

22 Here, it seems as if Guyer would merely deny that there was a ‘specific, always identical way’ pleasure would always feel. But, indeed, he is committed to the much stronger thesis that, unlike objective sensations [Empfindungen], pleasure does not have any phenomenal character at all: “To be sure, some cases of pleasure must involve distinctive sensations, for there is a characteristic way or range of ways that a good Bordeaux tastes, and a different way that a good Burgundy tastes, and each is enjoyable; but it is less plausible that there is a distinctive feeling of pleasure, whether always the same or not, in addition to the characteristic Bordeaux taste and Burgundy taste.” (Guyer 2018, p. 163) Guyer is more hesitant on this point when it comes to displeasure.
The contrast between feeling and understanding Kant avails himself of – pleasure and displeasure ‘are felt, not understood’ – must refer to the phenomenal character of pleasure, i.e., to the way pleasure feels. What else should this contrast refer to? Thus, to properly grasp what pleasure is, one must feel pleasure oneself. Recall that, for Nagel, the subjective point of view associated with the phenomenal character of experience is “beyond the reach of human concepts.” (Nagel 1974, p. 441) Kant’s remark that pleasure is not understood and, thus, ineffable is much in line with this specific trait of experience’s phenomenal character.

The thesis that, for Kant, pleasure is subjective in Nagel’s sense (SN) finds further support in the structure of the Analytic of Beautiful. Obviously, ‘pleasure’ is one of the key concepts in Kant’s theory of beauty. As early as in § 1, this notion is at the center of Kant’s argument; for he claims that “[t]he judgment of taste is aesthetic” (KU, AA 05: 203), which basically means that judgments of taste can only be justified by the feeling of pleasure. In § 2, Kant goes on by claiming that the pleasure in the beautiful is disinterested. In § 5, he claims that the pleasure in the beautiful is free; and in § 6, this pleasure is described as non-conceptual (and yet universal). However, it is only in § 10 that Kant puts forward a definition of pleasure, to wit, the one quoted above: “The consciousness of the causality of a representation with respect to the state of the subject, for maintaining it in that state, can here designate in general what is called pleasure” (KU, AA 05: 220). This procedure makes good sense once we acknowledge that pleasure is something which is ‘felt, not understood.’ If pleasure is primarily characterized by a certain ‘what-it-is-likeness,’ Kant does not need to define ‘pleasure’ in the first place, because qua being a feeling everyone has an implicit grasp on what pleasure is and, most importantly, what pleasure feels like.

Let me emphasize that this phenomenological understanding of pleasure does not contradict the functional (or dispositional) picture sketched above. It

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23 In the Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime Kant already notes: “To be sure, we do one another an injustice when we dismiss one who does not see the value or the beauty of what moves or charms us by saying that he does not understand it. In this case it is not so much a matter of what the understanding sees but of what the feeling is sensitive to.” (Observations, AA 02: 225) See also Kant’s remark in the Metaphysics of Morals that “pleasure and displeasure cannot be explained for themselves” (MS, AA 06: 212).

24 For a comprehensive reconstruction of the Analytic of the Beautiful see Berger (2022).

25 See KU, AA 05: 204 f.

26 See KU, AA 05: 210.

27 See KU, AA 05: 211.
is undeniable that Kant’s official definitions of ‘pleasure’ refer to something like a disposition or a functional role to remain in a current state. Yet, as Kant himself points out, this does not provide an adequate understanding of pleasure: “they [pleasure and displeasure] can be only inadequately explained through the influence that a representation has on the activity of the powers of the mind by means of this feeling” – the influence of ‘preserving this state itself . . . or for producing its object’ (EEKU, AA 20: 232, my emphasis). Hence, Kant himself argues that the functional or dispositional picture is inadequate and, thus, incomplete. Nagel, too, holds that it is incomplete, and in this sense inadequate: “I do not deny that conscious mental states and events cause behavior, nor that they may be given functional characterizations. I deny only that this kind of thing exhausts their analysis.” (Nagel 1974, p. 437)

As outlined above, Nagel’s understanding of the subjective includes essentially the individual or species-specific point of view. For Kant, pleasure must be felt, and therefore it seems reasonable that pleasure is, in the first place, experienced from the first-person point of view (priority of the individual point of view). But what about the species-specific point of view which, according to Nagel, can be occupied using one’s imagination? In general, Kant holds that every creature endowed with sensibility is able to feel pleasure. Therefore, “[a]greeableness is also valid for nonrational animals” (KU, AA 05: 210). However, I am hesitant to assume that we, as human beings, could properly imagine what it is like for a bat to feel pleasure. I am not aware of any passage in Kant which would clarify whether the phenomenal character of pleasure is bound to certain species or is the same for every feeling creature, so I will not pursue this point further. We will see that things are much clearer when it comes to pleasure in the beautiful.

28 Therefore, the following argument put forward by Guyer is at odds with the passage from the First Introduction: “on Kant’s account of definition, according to which a proper definition must include everything essential to its concept and indeed everything essential to recognize an instance of its concept, anything left out of the definition would only be accidentally connected to its object. Thus, if there were a distinctive way in which pleasure or pain always feel, that would be an additional, synthetic claim, which would have to be based on empirical evidence – and Kant makes no attempt to provide such evidence” (Guyer 2018, p. 158).

29 See also Chalmers’ distinction between the “phenomenal concept of mind” and the “psychological concept of mind”: “On the phenomenal concept, mind is characterized by the way it feels; on the psychological concept, mind is characterized by what it does.” (Chalmers 1996, p. 11) Chalmers relates the latter to functionalism. Moreover, he argues that both can co-occur in one mental state. Unlike Kant, he leaves it an open question of whether emotions are primarily phenomenal states: “It is not quite obvious whether the phenomenal aspect is essential for a state to be an emotion, however; there is clearly a strong associated psychological property as well.” (Chalmers 1996, p. 19).
3.2 Pleasure in the Beautiful

If pleasure in general is endowed with phenomenal character, this will also hold true for pleasure in the beautiful. This phenomenality, however, does not imply that pleasure in the beautiful is characterized by a specific phenomenal character which makes it distinguishable from any other kind of pleasure. Still, a phenomenological understanding of pleasure in general will open up the way for attributing such a specific phenomenal character to the pleasure in the beautiful. In what follows, I will argue for this latter thesis by focusing on the disinterested character of the pleasure in the beautiful.

3.2.1 Disinterestedness and Phenomenal Character

There is no explicit textual support for an interpretation of disinterestedness in terms of phenomenal character. There is, however, a strong structural reason for this interpretation that draws on the overall argument of the Analytic of the Beautiful. In § 2, Kant claims that the pleasure or “satisfaction that determines the judgment of taste is without any interest” (KU, AA 05: 204). The pleasure in the beautiful is not a pleasure in the existence of an object and it is not connected to any desire; this is the starting point of Kant’s overall argument in the Analytic. All other major claims and arguments are derived directly or indirectly from this thesis of disinterestedness (TD). In § 6, Kant argues that “[t]he beautiful is that which, without concepts, is represented as the object of a universal satisfaction” (KU, AA 05: 211); and he claims that “[t]his explanation of the beautiful can be deduced from the previous explanation of it as an object of satisfaction without any interest” (KU, AA 05: 211). In § 9, Kant refers to the thesis that the pleasure is non-conceptual and universal to argue for the free and harmonious play of the faculties; since the non-conceptuality and universality of the pleasure in the beautiful was ‘deduced’ from TD, Kant must indirectly draw on the latter to argue for the free and harmonious play. In § 11, Kant goes on to argue that the judgment of taste is grounded on a subjective purposiveness without a

30 In my understanding, the different kinds of pleasure in Kant all have a distinct phenomenology. Thus, one can distinguish the feelings in the agreeable, the beautiful and the good merely by relying on their phenomenal character. For a characterization of the phenomenal character of respect [Achtung] see Kriegel & Timmons (2021). – Note that if the functional account of pleasure was complete, pleasure in the beautiful could only be identified as such by reflecting on its causes or consequences.

31 See KU, AA 05: 216 f.
purpose; and again, he presupposes TD in his argument.32 Because of its function as the starting point and crucial reference point of the overall argument, one would assume that Kant would offer a good argument to firmly establish TD in the first place. But in fact, Kant never offers any such argument, and only on pain of circularity could he rely on any thesis introduced later in the text (e.g., the free play of the faculties) to argue for disinterestedness.33 Rather, and quite strikingly, Kant seems to be confident that he can just presuppose TD as a brute matter of fact. This impression is primarily evoked by the following formulations of TD:

But if the question is whether something is beautiful, one does not want to know whether there is anything that is or that could be at stake, for us or for someone else, in the existence of the thing, but rather how we judge it in mere contemplation (intuition or reflection).

One only wants to know whether the mere representation of the object is accompanied with satisfaction in me, however indifferent I might be with regard to the existence of the object of the representation.

One can easily see that to say that it 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.

One must not be in the least biased in favor of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in matters of taste.

Note Kant’s frequent usage of ‘one’ (in German: ‘man’). My suggestion is that ‘one can easily see’ that the pleasure in the beautiful is disinterested because disinterestedness is an integral part of the phenomenal character of the pleasure in the beautiful. In other words, one can easily see or, rather, feel that the pleasure is disinterested simply because this is what the pleasure feels like.

There is further support for such a phenomenological understanding of TD. We have already seen that TD, broadly speaking, means that pleasure in the beautiful is not taken in the existence of an object and is not connected to any desire. This meaning can be inferred from Kant’s definition of ‘interest’ put forward in § 2:

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32 See KU, AA 05: 221.
33 For such a strategy see the following remark of Guyer: “the fact that the disinterestedness of aesthetic response is a consequence of its explanation as due to the harmony of imagination and understanding, rather than vice versa” (Guyer 1979, p. 169; see also p. 178).
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 as its determining ground or else as necessarily interconnected with its determining ground.

(KU, AA 05: 204)

What it means that a pleasure is not taken in the existence of an object and is not connected to any desire is far from obvious, especially as matters stand argumentatively in § 2. To really understand what TD means, one would have to draw on the notions of the free play of the faculties and the formal purposiveness of the beautiful object’s form. Thus, one aspect of the meaning of TD is that pleasure in the beautiful is not taken in the existence of an object, but in an inner activity of the subject (the free play of the faculties) which is not an activity of the faculty of desire. Another aspect is that pleasure in the beautiful is not taken in the “matter of the representations” (KU, AA 05: 224), i.e., in a mere sensation, by which something existing is given to us, but in the object’s form. Moreover, it is based on a purposiveness without any purpose, where the latter could determine the will. However, these different aspects of the meaning of TD are not yet present or let alone in any sense argued for in § 2; for, again, it is much later that the notions of the free play of the faculties, the beautiful object’s form and the purposiveness without a purpose are introduced. Hence, TD must have a basic meaning which is already available and comprehensible in § 2. And this meaning, I suppose, is phenomenological.34 From this point of view, TD is grounded in everyone’s experience of what it is like to feel pleasure in the beautiful.

Is it linguistically possible to explain what the pleasure in the beautiful feels like? Recall that pleasure ‘is felt, not understood.’ So, strictly speaking, we cannot understand or put into words what it is like to feel a disinterested pleasure. We can only try to describe this phenomenal experience further by making use of other phenomenological terms. Thus, we could say that the pleasure is detached from any wanting or desiring, where the latter is also characterized by a specific phenomenal character.

Was Kant himself aware of how much his argument in the Analytic of the Beautiful depends on the specific phenomenal character of the pleasure in the beautiful? As the remark from the First Introduction shows, he certainly concurred that pleasure is essentially characterized by its phenomenal character. However, he does not make explicit that pleasure in the beautiful has a distinct phenomenal character, to wit, the character of disinterestedness. Why not?

34 Thereby, I do not deny that TD also has those other meanings or aspects of meaning. I merely deny that these are already available to the reader in § 2.
Three possible reasons are maybe not far to seek: First, Kant was unaware of how much his argument depends on the phenomenal character of disinterestedness; he only unconsciously used it in his argument. Secondly, the distinct phenomenal character of the pleasure in the beautiful was so obvious to Kant that he did not consider it necessary to put any emphasis on it. Thirdly, Kant was aware of the distinct phenomenal character of the pleasure in the beautiful and its role for his argument, but he did not address it more explicitly in the text because that might have arisen the suspicion that his argument would not properly fit within the framework of transcendental philosophy. Any decision on this matter would be merely speculative. For our current purposes, suffice it to say that Kant’s argument will only work if we take into account that pleasure in the beautiful has a specific phenomenal character: the character of disinterestedness.

So far, we have seen that pleasure in the beautiful has the phenomenal character of disinterestedness. Thus, we already have good reason to assume that pleasure in the beautiful is subjective in Nagel’s sense (SN). In what follows, I will ask how pleasure in the beautiful relates to the individual and the species-specific points of view.

3.2.2 Pleasure in the Beautiful and the Subjective Point of View

Nagel’s notion of the subjective (SN) is inextricably linked to his conception of points of view: What is subjective is merely accessible from the individual or species-specific point of view. Is this aspect of the subjective also an essential part of Kant’s conception of the pleasure in the beautiful?

First and foremost, pleasure in the beautiful is bound to the individual or first-person point of view. Surely, I must have felt pleasure in the beautiful myself to have any grasp on what it is like to feel such a pleasure. This is the priority of the individual point of view that we also find in Nagel. But for Kant, the individual point of view is important in another respect, that is, with regard to specific manifestations of beauty. To decide whether a given object (e.g., a certain flower) is beautiful, I need to behold that object myself and feel pleasure in the beautiful myself. As Kant puts it:

35 For a discussion of why a phenomenological starting point of the Analytic does in fact not contradict Kant’s transcendental approach see Berger 2022, pp. 193–202.
Whether a garment, a house, a flower is beautiful: no one allows himself to be talked into his judgment about that by means of any grounds or fundamental principles. One wants to submit the object to his own eyes, just as if his satisfaction depended on sensation; [. . .].

(KU, AA 05: 215 f.)

This second role of the individual point of view constitutes a difference to other judgments about experiences with phenomenal character. To make the judgment that Jim’s house is red I can rely on Joanne’s report that Jim’s house is red. But to make the judgment that Jim’s house is beautiful I need to submit his house to my own eyes and feel pleasure in the beautiful myself.

The species-specific point of view is important for Kant’s theory of beauty in two respects. First, pleasure in the beautiful is bound to the human nature being sensuous as well as rational. Therefore, only human beings can experience pleasure in the beautiful. As Kant puts it: “beauty is valid only for human beings, i.e., animal but also rational beings, but not merely as the latter (e.g., spirits), rather as beings who are at the same time animal” (KU, AA 05: 210). Pleasure in the beautiful can only be felt by creatures endowed with sense organs (for the sensory input) as well as the faculties of imagination and understanding (to enter into a free play of the faculties). In that way, pleasure in the beautiful can only be felt by human beings and is, thus, bound to the human-specific point of view. Considering Nagel once more, it seems reasonable that we can imagine (sympathetically) what it is like for other human beings to feel pleasure in the beautiful, because they are sufficiently similar to us (they have sense organs, imagination and understanding). In that way, the Kantian pleasure in the beautiful seems to be accessible from the human-specific point of view. The second respect in which the species-specific point of view is important refers to Kant’s thesis that the pleasure in the beautiful is universally valid.36 When I feel pleasure in the beautiful on the occasion of a certain object, this pleasure is not only valid for me but for every human being. In that way, each manifestation of the pleasure in the beautiful includes the human-specific point of view. Importantly, a beholder who feels pleasure in the beautiful is aware that her pleasure extends to all human beings. For Kant explicitly speaks of “the universal validity of this pleasure perceived in the mind as connected with the mere judging of an object” (KU, AA 05: 289, my italics).37 When I feel

36 See for instance: “The beautiful is that which, without concepts, is represented as the object of a universal satisfaction.” (KU, AA 05: 211).

37 One might suspect that it is not the ‘universal validity of the pleasure’ but merely the pleasure which is ‘perceived in the mind as connected with the mere judging of an object.’ However, Kant’s original formulation strongly suggests the reading above: “Also ist es nicht die Lust, sondern die Allgemeingültigkeit dieser Lust, die mit der bloßen Beurteilung eines
pleasure in the beautiful, I perceive the universal validity of this pleasure ‘as connected with the mere judging of an object.’ This presupposes that I perceive the universal validity of this pleasure in the first place and, thus, that I am immediately aware of the pleasure’s universal validity. I have argued elsewhere that this awareness is included in the phenomenal character of the pleasure: It is part of the pleasure’s ‘what-it-is-likeness’ that we feel connected to our fellow human beings. In that spirit, Kant speaks of “the confluence of the feeling of everyone with that of each” (KU, AA 05: 240). Now, the immediate awareness of the pleasure’s universality has an interesting consequence for the human-specific point of view: The first-person experience of the pleasure already includes a transcending of the individual point of view in favor of the human-specific point of view. When compared to Nagel’s approach, this leads to an interesting result: On Kant’s account of the pleasure in the beautiful we do not need to imaginatively take up the point of view of other human beings. Rather, we already occupy this point of view whenever we feel pleasure in the beautiful.

In sum, the individual point of view (IP) and the human-specific point of view (HP) each have a twofold relevance for Kant’s theory of aesthetic pleasure:

**IP**
- **IP** To have a grasp on what pleasure in the beautiful feels like in the first place, I need to feel this pleasure myself.
- **IP** To decide whether a given object is beautiful, I need to behold that object and feel pleasure in the beautiful myself.

**HP**
- **HP** The pleasure in the beautiful is bound to the sensuous and rational nature of human beings. Thus, human beings can imaginatively take a grasp on what it is like to experience pleasure in the beautiful from the human-specific point of view.
- **HP** The first-person experience of the pleasure in the beautiful already includes a transcending of the individual point of view in favor of the human-specific point of view.

The pleasure in the beautiful has a phenomenal character, and it is also bound to the individual and human-specific point of view. The Kantian pleasure in the beautiful is subjective in Nagel’s sense of the subjective (SN).

Gegenstandes im Gemüte als verbunden wahrgenommen wird, welche a priori als allgemeine Regel für die Urteilskraft, für jedermann gültig, in einem Geschmacksurteile vorgestellt wird.“ (KU, AA 05: 289).

38 See Berger 2022, pp. 186–188.
4 AI, Pleasure and Beauty

What does all of this teach us about AI? A functionalist account of pleasure along the lines presented above could possibly attribute to AI (computers) the ability to have pleasure. As a matter of fact, Nagel remarks that “functional states, or intentional states, [...] could be ascribed to robots or automata that behaved like people though they experienced nothing” (Nagel 1974, p. 436).

For the sake of argument, we shall assume that AI could have representations (something which I actually doubt). If a computer received a representation as an input and either preserved its current state or produced the corresponding object as an output, we could, on the functionalist picture drawn from Kant’s definition of pleasure, ascribe pleasure to this computer. Yet I have argued that, for Kant, an adequate understanding of pleasure is not functional, but phenomenological. My argument for the claim that AI cannot experience pleasure is straightforward: AI (at the current stage of development) is determined and at least in principle completely describable by the laws of physics. The laws of physics are bound to the objective point of view. They do not reveal what-it-is-likeness, otherwise we would know what it is like to be a bat if we knew everything there is to know about bats in terms of physics.39 Since pleasure, for Kant, is primarily characterized by the way it feels – its phenomenal character –, AI cannot experience pleasure. As Schönecker puts it: “There is no what it is like to be a computer, and therefore, unlike beings for whom there is a certain phenomenal inner life, to be in a computational state is not to be in a mental state.” (Schönecker 2018, pp. 78 f.) Since there is no ‘what it is like to be a computer,’ there is no ‘what it is like to feel pleasure’ for a computer.

What is true for pleasure in general applies to pleasure in the beautiful as well. We have seen that the pleasure in the beautiful has the specific phenomenal character of disinterestedness. Recall, once more, that for Kant pleasure is primarily ‘felt, not understood.’ Thus, pleasure in the beautiful is primarily felt as being disinterested. Since AI cannot feel anything, it cannot feel disinterested pleasure. There is no ‘what it is like to feel disinterested pleasure’ for a computer.

Computers are bound to the objective point of view, the point of view of physics. Conversely, there is no subjective point of view for computers. There are no first-person experiences for computers and, thus, no individual point of view. Therefore, there is also no species-specific (i.e., no computer-specific) point of view. In addition, it is dubitable that computers have the ability to imagine (sympathetically) and, thus, to imaginatively take up others’ points of view.

39 See also Jackson’s famous Mary-case (Jackson 1986).
view. Moreover, since computers cannot experience pleasure in the beautiful, they cannot experience the transcending of the individual point of view which is included in that pleasure’s phenomenal character.

The fact that AI cannot experience pleasure in the beautiful has an important consequence for beauty. For Kant, beauty is constituted by the feeling of disinterested pleasure, experienced from the first-person perspective. Moreover, there is no grasp on beauty by applying rules. As Kant puts it: “there can be no objective rule of taste that would determine what is beautiful through concepts” (KU, AA 05: 231). Since AI cannot feel pleasure but can only apply rules (based on algorithms), AI has no adequate grasp on beauty.⁴⁰ Although AI might be able to identify beautiful objects, it is not able to experience beauty as such. Like Mary who knows everything about colors in terms of physics but has never seen the color red,⁴¹ AI could know many things about beauty (e.g., facts about art history, empirical facts about proportions or color arrangements people tend to find beautiful) but could not feel disinterested pleasure and, thus, could not experience beauty.

Two objections could be raised, both related to empirical issues in the development of AI. The first concerns AI’s ability to have emotions. Don’t we have affective computing yet and, therefore, evidence that AI can have emotions such as pleasure? When in 1997 Rosalind Picard introduced the term ‘affective computing,’ she put forward the following rather broad definition: Affective computing is “computing that relates to, arises from, or deliberately influences emotions” (Picard 1997, p. 3). In what follows, we shall have a brief look at current achievements in the realm of affective computing.

Affective computing has made some progress when it comes to the recognition of emotions (affect recognition). For instance, there has been some

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⁴⁰ For this argument see Berger 2018.
⁴¹ See Jackson 1986, p. 291. – For a Mary-case concerning emotion see the following example by Goldie: “Irene is an icy-cool ice-scientist. Being an ice-scientist, she knows all the properties of ice. In particular, she has complete knowledge of the dangers that can arise from walking on ice; show her any icy pond or lake and she will know where the dangers lie. Yet she is icy-cool, and has never felt fear (far-fetched perhaps, but no more than Mary and her black and white world; imagine that Irene has been brought up in an incredibly coddled manner). Nevertheless, in spite of this lack, she not only has a theoretical concept of dangerousness; she also has a theoretical concept of fear, as being a sort of state that, roughly, plays a causal role: People are typically afraid when they perceive dangerous things, and they respond to fear by behaving in certain typical ways. Then, one day, Irene goes out onto the ice, falls, and for the first time feels fear – fear towards the dangerous ice. She now knows, ‘from the inside’, what it is like to feel fear, so she has gained a new concept – a phenomenal concept.” (Goldie 2002, pp. 244 f.)
success in implementing the capacity to identify emotions by detecting and processing facial expressions (e.g., by making use of Paul Ekman’s *Facial Action Coding System FACS*). Other approaches focus on voice analysis (e.g., emotion detection via the tone of voice), sentiment analysis (i.e., emotion detection in the content or meaning of verbal expressions), or biosensors (i.e., emotion detection via the detection of bodily changes); in addition, there are also multimodal-approaches. However, affect recognition so far has often led to inaccurate results, since, for instance, the context of the emotion is not considered and cultural variances are ignored. Thus, the authors of the *AI Now 2019 Report* claim: “There remains little to no evidence that these new affect-recognition products have any scientific validity.” (AI Now 2019 Report, p. 51) In any case, it should be clear that the mere recognition of emotions does not include or presuppose the ability to *feel* emotions. Human beings often recognize others’ emotions by means of empathy, and at least affective or emotional empathy includes ‘what-it-is-likeness.’ But surely, such emotional empathy is not experienced by a computer that makes use of affect recognition in the way just outlined.

AI, at the current stage of development, can also “give the impression of emotionality. This is likely to be possible in various manifestations in robots, in avatars and in embodied conversational agents (ECAs), through speech, appearance, behaviour and in other ways.” (Goldie, Döring & Cowie 2011, p. 728) Still, none of these abilities amounts to the ability to have or, rather, *feel* emotions. For, again, it is the phenomenal character of the emotion which is lacking.

We have seen that, according to Picard’s definition, affective computing also pursues ‘computing that . . . arises from . . . emotions.’ There have been some attempts to make AI feel emotions. However, such attempts generally focus on the functional role of emotions for cognition and behavior. For instance, Kuehn and Haddadin recently introduced “the artificial Robot Nervous System aRNS as a new way of integrating tactile sensation and according reflex

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42 See Bösel 2019, p. 223; Misselhorn 2021, pp. 20 f.
43 For an overview see Misselhorn 2021, pp. 20–42.
44 See also the following definition of ‘affect recognition’: “Affect recognition is an AI-driven technology that claims to be able to detect an individual’s emotional state based on the use of computer-vision algorithms to analyze their facial microexpressions, tone of voice, or even their gait.” (AI Now 2019 Report, p. 50) Notably, in his suggestion for a developmental approach to artificial empathy, Asada (2015) differentiates between emotional and cognitive empathy; but, concerning the application to affective developmental robotics, he does not mention the phenomenal character of emotional empathy.
45 See Misselhorn 2018, pp. 42 f.
reactions into robot control based on the concept of *robot pain sensation*” (Kuehn/Haddadin 2017, p. 2). aRNS is explicitly designed to achieve a certain robot behavior. As Asada puts it, “[t]heir motivation was to apply the idea of ensuring safety in human-robot collaborations, and the main focus was the generation of avoidance behavior” (Asada 2019, p. 5). Strikingly, the authors explicitly do not claim to have created *emotional experiences* in robots. They explain:

> Obviously, pain is also strongly an emotional experience, not only influenced by the signals coming from the nociceptors. Thus, one distinguishes between the emotional experience of pain and the nociceptive signals that may lead to pain experiences. In this paper, we focus on the latter. (Kuehn/Haddadin 2017, p. 1)

Hence, the authors are not concerned with the phenomenal character of pain or other emotions.

Another approach to affective computing, proposed by Man and Damasio, focuses on “the design and construction of a new class of machines organized according to the principles of life regulation, or homeostasis” (Man/Damasio 2019, p. 446). Man and Damasio suggest a combination of soft robotics and machine learning to “produce machines with an artificial equivalent of feeling” (Man/Damasio 2019, p. 446). As compared to hard materials such as metal, soft materials may add vulnerability to robots. Moreover, the authors suggest combining soft material with deep neural networks to build “correspondences between inner space and outer space, between internal homeostatic data and external sense data” (Man/Damasio 2019, p. 450). However, the authors are very clear that soft matter is “not sufficient to generate feeling on its own”; it is merely “more likely to naturally create the kind of relationship that, we expect, admits of an approximation to feeling” (Man/Damasio 2019, p. 448). As with aRNS, their homeostatic approach pursues a functional goal. The authors explain: “The initial goal of the introduction of physical vulnerability and self-determined self-regulation is not to create robots with authentic feeling, but rather to improve their functionality across a wide range of environments.” (Man/Damasio 2019, p. 451, my emphasis)

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46 See also: “The overall behavior allows the robot to sensitively interact with its environment at nominal pain level, while mitigating potential risks by activating human inspired reflex strategies if the pain level increases.” (Kuehn/Haddadin 2017, p. 2).

47 The authors give the following example: “Markvicka et al. fabricated a soft electronic ‘skin’ that localizes and can trigger responses to damage. They impregnated an elastomer base with droplets of liquid metal that, on rupture, cause changes in electrical conductivity across the damaged surface.” (Man/Damasio 2019, p. 448).
In sum: At the current stage of development, we cannot ascribe experiences with phenomenal character and a subjective point of view to AI. Affective computing has not succeeded yet in creating computers that feel emotions.48 As Man and Damasio put it: “Today’s robots lack feelings. They are not designed to represent the internal state of their operations in a way that would permit them to experience that state in a mental space. They also lack selfhood and ‘aboutness.’” (Man/Damasio 2019, p. 446)49

The second objection focuses on the thesis that, on the assumption of some kind of naturalistic evolutionary theory, consciousness along with ‘what-it-is-likeness’ has evolved from unconscious matter.50 Thus, we cannot foreclose the option that conscious computers will evolve from a complex arrangement of unconscious matter. Although we cannot completely deny this possibility, it is very unlikely. As Schönecker puts it: “Just a single biological cell already is extremely complex, let alone the brain. By comparison, a computer is a very primitive object; there is no more reason to think that it has a mind than to think a sewing machine has one.” (Schönecker 2018, p. 86)

5 Conclusion

Unlike Nagel, Kant does not use the term ‘subjective’ to refer to the phenomenal character of experience. Nonetheless, what is signified by Nagel’s notion of the subjective, to wit, ‘what-it-is-likeness’ and the subjective point of view, can be found in Kant’s works, most prominently when it comes to his notion of pleasure. Not only does an adequate account of pleasure, for Kant, rely on its phenomenal character, but different kinds of pleasure can also be distinguished by their different phenomenal characters. I have argued that the phenomenal character of the pleasure in the beautiful can be characterized by disinterestedness. Moreover, the pleasure in the beautiful is bound to the individual point of

49 It has been argued by quite a few authors that pleasure, for Kant, is an intentional mental state (see for instance Allison 2001, pp. 53 f. & 122 f.; Aquila 1982; Ginsborg 2015, pp. 94–110; Zuckert 2002). In different variants of this intentionality-thesis, pleasure in the beautiful is directed towards either another mental state (the free play of the faculties) or the representation of the beautiful object. If pleasure in the beautiful is intentional, one could draw on John Searle’s Chinese Room thought-experiment and argue that intentionality cannot be caused by “formal structure[s]” (Searle 1980, p. 420) or “computational processes” (Searle 1980, p. 422). I leave it for another day to follow this line of argument.
50 See Schönecker 2018, p. 86.
view: to have a grasp on what pleasure in the beautiful feels like I must feel this pleasure myself, and to judge whether a given object is beautiful I must feel disinterested pleasure myself while beholding this object. Although one can possibly occupy the human-specific point of view by sympathetically imagining what it is like to feel disinterested pleasure for other people, there is no need for such a procedure. In fact, a transcending of the individual point of view in favor of the human-specific (universal) point of view is already contained in the feeling of disinterested pleasure itself, to wit, in its phenomenal character.

I have, finally, argued that the Kantian realm of beauty is foreclosed to AI. Beauty, for Kant, is constituted by the feeling of disinterested pleasure, which must be experienced by each beholder herself when being confronted with a given object. Since computers or AI cannot have mental states with phenomenal character and, thus, cannot experience pleasure, AI cannot experience beauty. Therefore, AI does not have a proper grasp on beauty.

References

Apart from the Critique of Pure Reason, all references to Kant’s works are to Kant’s Gesammelte Schriften, Ausgabe der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1902 ff.). References to the Critique of Pure Reason are to the standard A and B pagination of the first and second editions. Translations are from The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant; translations are altered when considered necessary.

The following abbreviations of individual works are used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EEKU</td>
<td>Erste Einleitung in die Kritik der Urteilskraft/First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMS</td>
<td>Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten/Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</td>
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<tr>
<td>KpV</td>
<td>Kritik der praktischen Vernunft/Critique of Practical Reason</td>
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<tr>
<td>KrV</td>
<td>Kritik der reinen Vernunft/Critique of Pure Reason</td>
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<tr>
<td>KU</td>
<td>Kritik der Urteilskraft/Critique of Judgment</td>
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<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Die Metaphysik der Sitten/Metaphysics of Morals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime</td>
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<td>Progress</td>
<td>What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?</td>
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<td>Prol</td>
<td>Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik/Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</td>
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