

AESTHETICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

ARTICLES AND ARCHIVE DOCUMENTS

AN INTRODUCTION TO BOLZANO'S ESSAY ON BEAUTY

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A neglected gem in the history of aesthetics, Bolzano's essay on beauty is best understood when read alongside his other writings and philosophical sources.¹ This introduction is designed to contribute to such a reading. In Part I, I identify and discuss three salient ways in which Bolzano's account can be misunderstood. As a lack of familiarity with Bolzano's background assumptions is one source of these misunderstandings, in Part II, I elucidate some of his ideas about the psychological processes involved in the contemplation and enjoyment of beauty. In Part III, I situate Bolzano's discussion of beauty within the more general framework of his ideas about the nature of philosophy, the relation between philosophy and aesthetics, and the place of the concept of beauty within the latter. Part IV is devoted to Bolzano's discussion of some of his philosophical antecedents, including Kant. In Part V, I raise some objections to Bolzano's account and indicate how his advocates might respond to them.

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¹ Bernard Bolzano, *Abhandlungen zur Ästhetik: Erste Lieferung; Über den Begriff des Schönen. Eine Philosophische Abhandlung* (Prague: Borrosch et André, 1843). The first half of the essay (§§ 1–25) is translated as 'On the Concept of the Beautiful: A Philosophical Essay' in this issue of *Estetika*. In what follows I cite this Borrosch et André edition as *B*, giving paragraph and then page numbers, followed by those in the *Estetika* translation. For background information about Bolzano's life and works, see Edgar Morscher, 'Bernard Bolzano', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, fall 2014 ed. (Stanford University, 1997–), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/bolzano/>.

I. THREE WAYS TO MISUNDERSTAND BOLZANO ON BEAUTY

Bolzano's central thesis is that beauty is what rewards a certain kind of contemplation with pleasure.² It is easy to misunderstand this thesis if we fail to grasp various concepts and distinctions on which Bolzano relies in his discussion of contemplation and pleasure, such as notions of clarity and distinctness, which he analyses at length in his *Theory of Science*.³ For example, one may find Bolzano's mention of 'confused' and 'obscure' thoughts hopelessly vague or simply puzzling and uninformative: why would our perception and enjoyment of beauty have to be 'dark' or 'confused'? I return to this topic in Part II.

A second way to get Bolzano wrong is to read him as defending a traditional account according to which beauty is reducible to regularity in an object, as in Christian Wolff's thesis that beauty is the perfection (*Vollkommenheit*) of things insofar as their unity in multiplicity has the power to produce pleasure in us.⁴ Bolzano indeed relied upon this kind of account early in his career – most notably in an 1810 sermon on the reverential and moral value of the appreciation of

² On Bolzano's aesthetics in general, see Emil Utitz, 'Bernard Bolzano's Ästhetik', *Deutsche Arbeit* 2 (1908): 89–94; Hugo Bergmann, *Das philosophische Werk Bernard Bolzanos* (1909; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1970), 114–24; Karel Svoboda, 'Bolzano's Ästhetik', *Rozpravy Československé akademie věd: Řada SV* 64 (1954): 27–59; Dietfried Gerhardus, 'Bolzano's methodische Grundlegung einer rezeptionstheoretischen Ästhetik', in *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, by Bernard Bolzano, ed. Dietfried Gerhardus (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972), ix–xxxvi; Peter McCormick, 'Bolzano and the Dark Doctrine: An Essay on Aesthetics', in *Structure and Gestalt: Philosophy and Literature in Austria-Hungary and Her Successor States*, ed. Barry Smith (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1981), 69–113; Kurt Blaukopf, *Die Ästhetik Bernard Bolzanos: Begriffskritik, Objektivismus, 'echte' Spekulation und Ansätze zum Empirismus* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1996); Otto Neumaier, 'Die Kunst des blossen Gedankens', in *Bernard Bolzano's Erbe für das 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Edgar Morscher (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 1999), 411–38; Michael Stöltzner, 'Zur Gegenstandskonstitution in der Ästhetik Bolzanos', in *Kunst, Kunsttheorie und Kunstforschung im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs: In memoriam Kurt Blaukopf*, ed. Martin Seiler and Friedrich Stadler (Vienna: öbv, 2000), 227–50; Peter Stachel, 'Die Schönheitslehre Bernard Bolzanos', in *Geschichte der österreichischen Humanwissenschaften*, vol. 5, *Sprache, Literatur und Kunst*, ed. Karl Acham (Vienna: Passagen, 2003), 499–518; Christoph Landerer, *Eduard Hanslick und Bernard Bolzano: Ästhetisches Denken in Österreich in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2004); Achim Vesper, 'Betrachten und Unterscheiden: Bolzano über die Begrifflichkeit der ästhetischen Wahrnehmung', in *Kunst und Wissen: Beziehungen zwischen Ästhetik und Erkenntnistheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Astrid Bauereisen, Stephen Pabst, and Achim Vesper (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009), 103–20.

³ Bernard Bolzano, *Wissenschaftslehre: Versuch einer ausführlichen und grösstentheils neuen Darstellung der Logik mit steter Rücksicht auf deren bisherigen Bearbeiter*, 4 vols. (Sulzbach: Seidel, 1837). English trans. Bernard Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, 4 vols, trans. Rolf George and Paul Rusnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). In what follows I cite this work as *TS* giving the paragraph number, then the volume and page numbers in the first edition, followed by those in the Oxford translation.

⁴ For relevant citations, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 60–64.

natural beauty.⁵ Although in the 1843 essay Bolzano remarks that all beautiful objects have ‘rational proportions’, he does not maintain that investigating such proportions, as Wolff had proposed, could yield a satisfactory elucidation of the concept of beauty.⁶ Bolzano asserts that ‘a truly irrational proportion does not detract from the beauty of an object, so long as it is so close to being a rational proportion we do not perceive it as irrational. In the end, determining whether something is beautiful is not a matter of how the object is in and of itself, but rather only of how it appears to us’ (*B*, § 22.4, p. 43; p. 263).

A third way to get Bolzano wrong is to assimilate his thesis on beauty to some form of sensibility relativism, to a strong ‘subjectivist’ or even an ‘error-theoretical’ view. Some of what Bolzano says, such as the previously quoted sentence, seems to point us in these directions. I have in mind especially the part where Bolzano writes that the pleasure we take in beauty is at bottom, or essentially, ‘a pleasure in our *contemplation itself*’ (‘im Grunde ein Wohlgefallen an unserer *eigenen Betrachtung selbst*’). He adds immediately that we necessarily ‘project’ or ‘transfer’ this pleasure onto the object (the verb Bolzano uses is ‘übertragen’) (*B*, § 10, p. 26; p. 248).

Several questions may come to mind here. Does this analysis make a subjective reaction *necessary* to beauty? Does it follow that beauty would fail to exist in a world lacking perceivers who happen to have certain developed but imperfect cognitive capacities? And is not our experience of beauty in some sense illusory or erroneous if it ‘necessarily’ involves a projection or transference of our pleasure? So it may seem, but if we answer these questions affirmatively we have got Bolzano wrong.

In § 7 Bolzano expands a bit on what is involved when we engage ourselves in the contemplation of an object, and he says that our task is to determine ‘*what exactly the thing we have before us is*’. This, he tells us, requires the discovery of a concept, representation, or rule from which the attributes of the contemplated object can be derived. Only beings with sufficiently developed faculties of reasoning and judgement, and knowledge of the relevant concepts, can appropriately contemplate a beautiful object because it is necessary ‘to know [*erkennen*] which of the imagined qualities the object really has’ (*B*, § 7, p. 20; p. 242). Reference to some of Bolzano’s terminological clarifications may be helpful here. For Bolzano, ‘*Erkenntnis*’, which is often translated as ‘cognition’,⁷ is a

⁵ Bernard Bolzano, *Bernard Bolzano-Gesamtausgabe I: Schriften*, vol. 2, *Erbauungsreden für Akademiker*, ed. Jaromír Loužil (1813; Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog 1985), 174–87.

⁶ For background on Wolff’s proposed ‘psychometriae’, see Robert J. Richards, ‘Christian Wolff’s Prolegomena to Empirical and Rational Psychology: Translation and Commentary’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124 (1980): 227–39.

⁷ Rolf George and Paul Rusnock’s ‘Translations of Key Terms’ gives *Erkenntnis* as ‘cognition, knowledge’ (*TS*, p. 1:xxix).

true judgement' (TS, § 26, p. 1:11; p. 1:86). 'True cognition,' he adds, is, like 'true knowledge,' a pleonasm. As for truth, Bolzano maintains that a proposition is true 'whenever that which it states is as it states it to be' (TS, § 25, p. 1:112; p. 1:84). 'Qualities' here translates *Beschaffenheiten*, a term that Bolzano takes in a broad sense including 'anything that belongs to an object, whether always, for a very short time, or only for one moment': 'whatever is had (*quodcunque habetur*) must be a quality'; the term 'qualities' embraces both 'proper, internal, or absolute' properties as well as external or relative ones, which are generally called 'relations' (TS, § 80, p. 379; p. 273). Putting these elements together, it becomes clear that Bolzano maintains that there is a strong epistemic constraint on the appreciation of beauty. He refers explicitly to the 'appropriate' (*gehörig*) contemplation of a beautiful object. Those who contemplate and enjoy beauty in Bolzano's sense must respond accurately and comprehensively to the qualities of whatever it is they are contemplating.

As we have seen, Bolzano's analysis of beauty refers to subjective responses, but it is crucial to grasp that it is not only *actual* responses that he has in mind: beauty is what *can* reward contemplation with pleasure, or as Bolzano puts it: 'The beautiful is thus indisputably an object that *could be agreeable*, even if it is not in fact agreeable' (B, § 2.2, p. 13; p. 236). Bolzano also comments: 'If there were only one human being on the planet earth, or if there were none at all, the beautiful would still be beautiful, and the foul would still be foul' (B, § 39, p. 67). So the *existence* of beauty does not depend on there being any *actual* observers who have had a pleasant experience of beauty; instead, the requirement is conditional: if there were an observer with such-and-such cognitive capacities who *appropriately* contemplated the object under the right circumstances, he or she would have the pleasurable experience of that object's beauty. So with beauty, the object has the relational quality of *being able* to give rise to pleasure when contemplated appropriately, and this is true because its attributes are such that they *can* occasion the successful exercise of the sort of cognitive proficiency Bolzano identifies. The contemplator, if there is one, has the qualities of being able to enjoy the beauty of the contemplated. This is obviously compatible with there being many actual observers whose responses to beautiful objects are divergent, inappropriate, and inaccurate.

What of Bolzano's claim that when we respond appropriately to beauty, we *necessarily* transfer our pleasure to the object? What exactly is the nature of this transference and why is it necessary? It may be helpful in this connection to compare Bolzano's position on beauty to that of George Santayana in his 1900 book, *The Sense of Beauty*. Santayana famously writes here that 'Beauty is an emotional element, a pleasure of ours, which nevertheless we regard as a quality

of things.⁸ It is tempting to think this is the same idea that Bolzano expresses in writing of a transfer or projection of our pleasure. And if that were true – if Bolzano ascribed to an error theory with regard to the central aesthetic property, beauty, then this would be hard to square with what was said above about the epistemic constraints on beauty's 'appropriate contemplation'. Yet Bolzano does not attribute to all appreciators of beauty the kind of error of reification that Santayana mentions. When we take pleasure in contemplating a beautiful song, picture, or natural scene, we may report that we enjoy these objects. This is not an error because in the absence of the object, our particular act of contemplation and its specific psychological consequences – our pleasure or gratification – would not have been possible. We thereby have a good reason to give credit for our pleasure to the beautiful object, the qualities of which we have appropriately contemplated. Yet there is still a sense in which a 'transfer' takes place because our attention has been carried away from another source of our pleasure – the improvement of our cognitive powers.

Here we must recall what Bolzano says in § 9 about the sources of pleasure. His views on the matter depart significantly from the Wolffian assumption that pleasure is the intuitive awareness of perfection. According to Bolzano, exercising our cognitive powers (our *Erkenntniskräfte*, or faculties of knowledge) is a way of improving them, if only because the exercise brings our proficiency to our attention and makes it more likely that we will subsequently put this ability to some use. (This is a very general claim, and not one that refers only to the experience of beauty.) Bolzano maintains that any such improvement of our abilities is accompanied by pleasure, and this is his explanation of why we enjoy beauty. An experience of pleasure is always conscious, but it does not normally involve our having a distinct and clear meta-cognition of the psychological processes that gave rise to the feeling. As Bolzano puts it in his discussion of our contemplation of beauty, we are not 'distinctly conscious of all the individual representations, judgements, and inferences involved' (*B*, § 7, p. 20; p. 242). Engaging in such reflections would be difficult and tiring and could very well prevent us from enjoying the contemplative experience. It is the absence of attention to these psychological springs of our contemplative pleasure, conjoined with the salience in our minds of the object's qualities, that motivates Bolzano to refer to a transference of our feelings to the object, and in this regard his view differs from the error theoretic position expressed by Santayana's famous statement about beauty. I return in Part II to the problem of interpreting his statement that we have an 'obscure intuition' of our cognitive proficiency.

⁸ George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty, Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1896), § 10, 48–49.

To recapitulate, for Bolzano the *pleasure or gratification* we take in the contemplation of beauty certainly depends on the actual or potential reactions of observers, since pleasure, as such, is a behavioural response. Yet Bolzano's explication of beauty begins by identifying beauty *as an object* or, more accurately, as a composite of qualities had by some object. He does not, however, commit himself to some substantive claim about the configuration of qualities which is necessary to beauty. Instead, Bolzano focuses on the psychological conditions under which a complex object can be observed and enjoyed, and it is these conditions that are central to the definition of beauty that he sets forth in §§ 11 and 14. If the object does not have qualities that stand in the right relation to each other it is not beautiful; if these complex qualities and their relations do not stand in the right relation to the cognitive powers of the observer, there can be no pleasurable response to them and hence no experience of beauty. The observer's cognition and the object's qualities become parts of a larger whole, which makes possible the pleasurable experience of beauty by means of an accurate and appropriate contemplative process. As is obvious from the text, Bolzano proposes that this cognition has special characteristics that he sought to identify by reworking notions of clarity and obscurity, distinctness and confusedness, which I shall briefly elucidate in the next section.

II. GETTING CLEAR AND DISTINCT ABOUT CLARITY AND DISTINCTNESS

Bolzano worked hard to achieve clarity and distinctness of thought on an extraordinarily broad range of topics. To study his lengthy commentaries on how his philosophical predecessors defined or understood a wide range of important philosophical terms is to discover an unprecedented exactitude and logical finesse. It is against this background that we can begin to appreciate the significance of Bolzano's emphasis on the indispensable and valuable role of indistinct, confused, and obscure ideas in the appreciation of beauty. More specifically, Bolzano affirms the epistemic and other value of a mode of cognition that falls short of the rationalist idea of perfect 'adequacy' explicated in terms of maximal clarity and distinctness.

It is useful and pleasurable, Bolzano notes, to be able to solve problems, make successful predictions, and discern patterns without having to have recourse to the effort of careful analytic thinking. That is precisely what is going on when we appreciate beauty. Bolzano denies, however, the prevalent thesis that beauty is an inexplicable *je ne sais quoi* that can only be represented confusedly and darkly. He calls it instead a 'darkly knowable unity' ('eine dunkel erkennbare Einheit'; *B*, §§ 29, 49). Although it is a successful apprehension of beauty, *by means of partly obscure and confused cognition*, that is the source of our pleasure in beauty, it does

not follow that beauty and its cognition are necessarily ineffable. Even so, beings with only clear and perfectly distinct true representations of the world could know beauty, but they could not enjoy it – at least not the way we do. One reason why that would be so is that God is omniscient and omnipotent and so could not enjoy pleasure caused by the improvement of His cognitive powers, which are already too perfect to admit of improvement. And if He is omniscient He could hardly know or enjoy beauty in a human manner that lacks distinct awareness of the source of his pleasure (*B*, §§ 9, 11).

It is well known that reference to clear and distinct ideas plays an important but elusive role in Descartes's theory of knowledge; it is also well known that Leibniz elaborated on the topic innovatively in § 2 of 'Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas'.⁹ By contrast, the medieval sources on this topic (Matthew of Aquasparta, Vitalis of Furno, Duns Scotus) are generally neglected, as is Bolzano's innovative reworking of the relevant distinctions.¹⁰ To get this part of the essay on beauty right, it is crucial to consult Bolzano's detailed analytic and historical comments in the *Theory of Science*, especially §§ 72, 235, 280, and 295–96. What follows here will have to be brief.¹¹

First, we need to take note of some of the distinctions that Bolzano lays out very quickly at the outset of his essay on beauty. First of all, there is the distinction between ideas and propositions 'in themselves' and the subjective mental events whereby subjects have these 'objective' ideas or propositions, the latter being the matter (*Stoff*) of subjective ideas, propositions, or judgements (we would be more likely to call this 'content' rather than 'matter', but Bolzano uses the word 'Inhalt' for another concept). So there is, for example, an objective unicorn idea whether or not anybody thinks of it and in spite of the fact that there are no actual unicorns. There are infinitely many propositions of which that unicorn idea is a part, but only some of these form the matter of token psychological events whereby somebody actually thinks them. The 'object' of an objective idea is that which is represented through the idea. Objective ideas have no matter or content; some have an object, others do not. Bolzano writes: 'Thus the subjective idea of a round square indeed has a matter, namely, the objective idea of a round square; yet there is no object to which either of these ideas (the subjective or the objective) applies' (*TS*, § 271, p. 3:9; p. 3:5). Bolzano says that an objective idea

⁹ G. W. Leibniz, 'Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas' (1684), in *Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 23–24.

¹⁰ For background, see Beiser, *Diotima's Children*.

¹¹ I go into this in a bit more detail and compare Bolzano's proposal to some work in contemporary empirical psychology in my 'Bolzano on Beauty', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54 (2014): 269–84.



always has 'objectuality' (*Gegenstandlichkeit*) but is not actual and does not literally exist.

Other distinctions that are important for our understanding of the essay on beauty are not explained therein. Most importantly, for Bolzano, clarity (*Klarheit*) is one thing, distinctness (*Deutlichkeit*) another. I turn first to what he has to say about the difference between clear (*klar*) subjective ideas and obscure (*dunkel*) ones, and then take up the difference between distinct and indistinct thoughts.

Very briefly, for Bolzano, the difference between clear and obscure ideas is not a matter of degree (unlike their vividness and strength). Somebody has a clear judgement or idea just in case that person has a special kind of second-order idea: 'An idea is *clear* if we represent it to ourselves by way of an *intuition*. It will be called *obscure* whenever this is not the case' (TS, § 280, p. 3:29; p. 3:17; see § 295, p. 3:117; p. 3:78). This elucidation is only informative, of course, if we know what Bolzano means by an intuition, which is the topic of the next few paragraphs.

Bolzano seems to have picked up on and combined two medieval ideas about *intuitio*.¹² The first idea is that an intuition is introspective or reflexive; the second idea is that an intuition is singular. To this, Bolzano adds a causal condition. An intuition, then, is an introspective singular idea that *represents* the particular mental event *that causes it*. Some *x* is an intuitive idea just in case *x* is an idea that represents a particular mental modification, *y*, by the thought, 'this *y*', where *y* is both the proximate cause and the sole object of *x*. Bolzano thus diverges importantly from Kant's usage of 'Anschauung'.¹³ Although in various passages Bolzano implies that he accepts the thesis that ideas and judgements that are primarily or purely intuitive are thereby conscious, to my knowledge he does not claim to have provided an analysis of consciousness, and his remarks on this topic are inconclusive. But consider Bolzano's manner of contrasting what he would call two different sorts of 'mixed ideas'. A first example of a mixed idea, expressed by 'this pain in my knee', is primarily intuitive, and conscious ('this pain in my knee that I cannot feel' is incoherent). The second example of a mixed idea, expressed by 'what I was thinking at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve last year', is primarily conceptual (in Bolzano's terminology), and refers to a thought the subject of which could well be unaware at the time of the statement (which would

¹² For background, see John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 285–87.

¹³ For a detailed comparison, see Timothy Rosenkoetter, 'Kant and Bolzano on the Singularity of Intuitions', *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 85 (2012): 89–129. For additional background regarding Bolzano on Kant, see Sandra Lapointe and Clinton Tolley, trans. and eds., *New Anti-Kant* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), which contains critical essays as well as a translation of František Příhonský's *Neuer Anti-Kant oder Prüfung der 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft' nach den in Bolzano's 'Wissenschaftslehre' niedergelegten Begriffen* (Bautzen: Weller, 1850).



be the case, for example, if the speaker has no memory of what she was thinking at that moment on New Year's Eve).

Bolzano states repeatedly that we have an apprehension and enjoyment of beauty in the absence of a *distinct* consciousness of all of the object's qualities or of the cognitions involved in our contemplation of it. What does that mean? If an idea is simple and the person who has this idea knows it to be so, it can be classified as distinct. If it is simple, but the person who has the idea does not know this, it is indistinct (*undeutlich*). If someone has an idea and knows it to be complex, and also knows what its parts are, then it is distinct (at least to the first degree, since there can be known or unknown parts within known parts, and so degrees of distinctness, just as Leibniz had contended). If the subject knows an idea is complex, but does not know what the parts of this idea are, then it is confused (*verworren*). If someone does not know that an idea is complex (either because it is wrongly taken to be simple, or the person has no thought on the matter), then this idea is confused.

Applying these distinctions now to the analysis of beauty, the upshot is that while we do have intuitions of various qualities of the contemplated object, our cognitive powers are also engaged in generating 'obscure' or non-intuitive representations of other actual and anticipated qualities. Another way to put this is to say that we attend, both consciously and unconsciously, to part-whole relations within the object, which entails that some of our representations of its qualities are distinct, while others are indistinct or confused. Being able to develop an adequate concept or rule for a complex object without having to have recourse to the effort of careful analytic and self-conscious calculations is enjoyable, and one of the sources of this enjoyment is the increase of our proficiency we thereby gain. When Bolzano writes that the subject has 'at least an obscure intuition' (for example, *B*, §§ 11, 27) of our cognitive proficiency, he refers to a mixed, partly intuitive and partly conceptual meta-cognition: when we contemplate a beautiful object, we have an intuition (and awareness) of our pleasure and an intuition of the activation and result of our cognitive proficiency, but we do not have an intuition of the improvement of our proficiency as the cause of our pleasure. If we do happen to know that the pleasure is the result of an increase of our proficiency, this would be a conceptual idea or judgement and not primarily an intuitive one. Normally when we are successful at discovering the pattern in a complex object we are aware of the pleasure we experience and of the exercise of our own capacities, but we do not have the reflexive thought that because we have become aware of our own capacities we have thereby approved them, and that this, or some other enhancement of our powers, is part of the reason why we have experienced the pleasure. Thus we enjoy the object in the kind of transfer

Bolzano mentions. I return to one implication of this thought at the end of this introduction.

III. BOLZANO ON BEAUTY, AESTHETICS, AND PHILOSOPHY

Bolzano's text on beauty bears the subtitle 'A Philosophical Treatise' (*Eine philosophische Abhandlung*). This may seem innocuous or trivial, but what Bolzano might have meant by both of the terms in this subtitle is worth looking into.

To start with 'Abhandlung' (which can be translated as either 'treatise' or 'essay'): in the final volume of his *Theory of Science*, Bolzano distinguishes between an *Abhandlung* and a *Lehrbuch*. The latter, Bolzano remarks, is written with the intention of encompassing the entirety of a science, or at least all of those truths deemed worth conveying to the members of the work's target audience. An *Abhandlung*, by contrast, is only meant to deal with a few of the truths that belong to a given science (Bolzano's term here is 'Wissenschaft', which embraces systematic knowledge in a wide range of fields, including the humanities). Bolzano gives various reasons why one might set out to write an essay or a treatise instead of a textbook, the most cogent of which is that it is possible to make and present a valuable discovery in some area of a science, and even a discovery of special importance, without having mastered the entirety of that discipline. Bolzano further comments: 'it may be more appropriate to present the theses concerning which we have something special to say separately, i.e., in a special essay, rather than combining them with all the remaining theses of the science, i.e., writing an entire treatise [*Lehrbuch*]' (*TS*, § 713, p. 4:623; p. 4:437).

These may seem like fairly mundane remarks about the differences between textbooks and essays, but they have interesting implications for our understanding of Bolzano's contributions to aesthetics. Bolzano did not believe that beauty was the only aesthetic quality, or that a science of aesthetics would be exhausted by even the most complete collection of truths about beauty. Nor is beauty the key to all artistic value (not even to the specifically artistic value of the fine or 'beautiful' arts – *die schöne Künste*). So that even if Bolzano deemed his explication of beauty innovative and successful, and even if he thought beauty was the 'fundamental' concept of aesthetics (as he says in the preface to the essay), it does not follow that he thought he had thereby provided the key to an explication of all aesthetic concepts, such as aesthetic qualities, aesthetic cognition, aesthetic experience, or aesthetic value. Bolzano notes in this regard that it would be erroneous to consider

investigations into the sublime, the ridiculous, the humorous, the romantic, the moving, the sentimental and many others, which are not overlooked in any textbook on aesthetics, to be investigations into beauty, since we can hardly convince ourselves that

they all fall within the concept of beauty as its species or kinds, an error that is so obvious that it seems to me that it is sufficient merely to mention it.¹⁴

Part of the relevant background here is Alexander Baumgarten's likely influence.¹⁵ When the latter first brought the term 'aesthetica' into the philosophical vocabulary in 1735, he did not think of this new branch of philosophy as the science of beauty, but as 'ars pulchre cognitandi' (the art of thinking beautifully), as 'theoria liberalium artium' (the theory of the liberal arts), as 'gnoseologia inferior' (the lower epistemology), as 'ars analogis rationis' (the art of what is analogous to reason), and, more generally, as the 'scientia cognitionis sensitivae' (the science of sensate cognition).¹⁶ Broadly speaking, Bolzano follows Baumgarten in this regard.

In *Theory of Science* Bolzano observes that aesthetics is one of the sciences, like jurisprudence, the boundary of which involves a concept that cannot be imported from some other science (*TS*, § 5, p. 1:22; p. 1:20). One implication of this is that although an essay on beauty should not be taken as a comprehensive treatment of aesthetics, an identification of the nature of beauty and an analysis of the components of the concept of beauty would contribute to a more general understanding of what does and does not fall within the field of aesthetics. Bolzano certainly acknowledged that the concept of beauty has a special place within the field, and at the outset of his essay on the fine arts, he succinctly sets forth a position on this topic. Taken as a scientifically ordered collection of relevant truths satisfying the constraints given by prior usage of the term 'aesthetics', the science of aesthetics embraces those true, worthwhile propositions and judgements that either pertain immediately to beauty or stand in a special relation to it. That special relation is characterized by Bolzano as follows: those aesthetic truths not immediately pertaining to beauty cannot be 'appropriately understood and most fruitfully applied' without understanding beauty, or vice versa, that is, truths in aesthetics pertaining directly to beauty cannot appropriately be understood and most fruitfully applied if these other concepts are not understood (in which case they belong to the field of aesthetics). Yet having set forth this strong, holistic, and pragmatic thesis regarding the outlines

¹⁴ Bernard Bolzano, *Über die Eintheilung der schönen Künste: Eine ästhetische Abhandlung* (Prague: Haase, 1849), §§ 1, 3. Bolzano had as early as 1818 written a brief manuscript on humour; see Bergmann, *Das philosophische Werk*, 122.

¹⁵ On Baumgarten's influence on Bolzano, see Egbert Witte, *Logik ohne Dornen: Die Rezeption von A. G. Baumgartens Ästhetik im Spannungsfeld von logischem Begriff und ästhetischer Anschauung* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2000), 163–83.

¹⁶ Søren Kjølrup, 'The Poem as Perfect Sensate Discourse: Literature and Cognition According to Baumgarten', in *From Text to Literature: New Analytic and Pragmatic Approaches*, ed. Stein Haugom Olsen and Anders Pettersson (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 177–88.

of aesthetics and the place of beauty therein, Bolzano then allows that the field has a far-reaching and heterogeneous historical dimension and embraces a wide range of truths pertaining to the lives of artists as well as the history of the arts and natural beauty.

Bolzano had good reasons, then, for calling his text on beauty an 'Abhandlung'. Did he also have special reasons for labelling it a *philosophical* one? A quick and easy, but ultimately misleading answer to that question is that Bolzano simply took it for granted that aesthetics was a subfield of philosophy and that his essay on its most important concept would thereby be philosophical. For a more accurate answer, however, we have to take into account what Bolzano had to say in a posthumously published text, *Was ist Philosophie?*, written after *Theory of Science*.¹⁷ In this text, Bolzano suggests that as far as the word 'philosophy' goes, we should not deviate from common usage, which is determinate enough to distinguish between contributions to philosophy and those made to mathematics, history, and other fields. Yet he thinks a more narrow concept is associated with the expressions 'to philosophize', and 'philosophical reflection and contemplation'. Bolzano seeks to explicate these latter notions in terms of reasoning from causes to effects and from grounds to consequences (and vice versa). This is not the place for a detailed discussion of Bolzano's investigations into what he called the ground-consequence relation, or *Abfolge* (grounding, entailment, but not deducibility), or of its relation to the logic and metaphysics of causation as he understood them.¹⁸ It suffices to note here that Bolzano argues that conceptual analysis, which is uncontroversially a part of philosophical reflection, is covered by his claim about the nature of philosophizing because when we seek to identify the components of a concept of which we are aware, we are investigating the causes of a psychological phenomenon. So in this broad sense of philosophical reflection, it is possible to philosophize about a very broad and diverse range of topics. Bolzano's list to this effect includes music, dance, and the art of cooking, all of which are, he avers, fitting topics for philosophizing. As examples of investigations that are not philosophical in his sense, Bolzano mentions pondering a philological problem in the interpretation of a biblical text, and trying to determine how long it takes light to travel from the moon to the earth. In this sense, then, Bolzano's claim that his text on beauty is philosophical means he will investigate consequence or entailment relations between the true propositions pertaining

¹⁷ Bernard Bolzano, *Was ist Philosophie?* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1849).

¹⁸ See Jan Sebestik, 'Bolzano's Logic', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, spring 2014 ed. (Stanford University, 1997–), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/bolzano-logic/>.

to beauty, and related cause-effect relations between psychological (and other) events involved in beauty and its apprehension.

Bolzano elaborates upon a more general classificatory notion of 'philosophy', which he understands as referring to a body of scientific knowledge having five main branches: logic, metaphysics, ethics, law, and political science. Bolzano notes in passing that whereas these five fields have since their very emergence been 'almost universally' recognized as the main branches of philosophy, there has been a 'less general' tendency to think of aesthetics as also being an 'integral component' of philosophy.¹⁹ Somewhat surprisingly, Bolzano was quite hesitant to accept that view. His main idea in this respect is that we should be able to discover what unifies the five branches of philosophy (and their related subfields), as well as what distinguishes them from the many fields about which it is possible to philosophize in the sense mentioned above. In so doing we will have brought forth the (unconscious) rationale underlying the common usage of the term 'philosophy'. Briefly, in this regard Bolzano's proposal is that these are the subjects the study of which is morally mandatory to pursue, at least for those who have the ability and opportunity. Bolzano says that the obligation to undertake such studies derives from the larger aim of attempting moral self-perfection (*eine sittliche Vervollkommnung*), which obligation ultimately finds its basis in Bolzano's more general utilitarian moral doctrine. As he put that more general point with regard to what he called the 'highest principle' of the theory of science: 'everything must be done in the way required by the laws of morality, thus in such a way that the greatest possible sum of good (the greatest possible promotion of the general well-being) is thereby produced' (*TS*, § 395, p. 4:26; p. 4:16).²⁰

With this overall utilitarian yardstick in place, Bolzano runs through his reasons for deeming the study of each of the five branches of philosophy necessary to the duty of becoming wiser and better, and in this context he makes a passing remark that reveals that he does not deem a similar argument available to those who might think that aesthetics is worthy of being recognized as the sixth branch on the tree of philosophy. The context is a parenthetical discussion of whether the philosophy of history merits such recognition. Bolzano acknowledges that there are reasons why it might be plausible to regard the study of this field as a duty for all those who seek to be wiser and better, but he does not find the argument decisive. It is even more 'disconcerting' (*befremdender*), he continues,

¹⁹ Bolzano, *Was ist philosophie?*, 19: 'Schon nicht so allgemein hat man auch die Ästhetik als einen integrierenden Bestandtheil der Philosophie betrachtet.'

²⁰ For more detail on Bolzano's substantive ethics, see Bernard Bolzano, 'Natural Morality', in *Selected Writings on Ethics and Politics*, trans. Rolf George and Paul Rusnock (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 199–229. This is a translation of Bolzano's 'Natürliche Moral', in *Lehrbuch der Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 1 (Sulzbach: Seidel, 1834), §§ 86–95.

when aesthetics, a subject that 'has much less than the philosophy of history to contribute to making us better and wiser', is presented as an essential component of any philosophical system.²¹ Bolzano explains the tendency to make this error in terms of a preference amongst certain philosophers of his day for trichotomies and 'threeness' (*Dreiheit*). More specifically, they deem human nature to have three essentially different powers, those of thinking, willing, and feeling or sensing. As aesthetics is the science of the latter, it is a necessary part of any adequate philosophical system. In sum, the essay on beauty is philosophical because in it Bolzano philosophizes in his specified sense, not because its truths stand amongst those that ought to be known by anyone aspiring to the honorific title of 'philosopher', or by anyone who seeks to become better and wiser.

IV. BOLZANO AND HIS IMMEDIATE PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES

The second half of Bolzano's essay on beauty is devoted to a meticulous survey of the literature. Bolzano says that if his own explication of beauty is correct, it would not be surprising to learn that other philosophers had already hit upon at least some of the conditions he acknowledges. At the same time, however, the very nature of our normal responses to beauty, which involve unclarity and indistinctness, helps explain why the correct explication has not been forthcoming. Bolzano begins his survey of the literature with a section § 26 in which he quotes and discusses cases where philosophers have got some of the conditions right, or have at least come close to having done so. He then turns to a long, chronologically ordered critical survey of various proposals that have been made in the philosophical literature, including Kant's influential discussion of beauty in the third *Critique*.

So whom does Bolzano acknowledge as having come up with elements of his analysis? The list of those who are mentioned in the paragraph on this question runs: (1) Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762), (2) Johann August Eberhard (1739–1809), (3) Johann Gebhard Ehrenreich Maass (1766–1823), and (4) Johann Friedrich Ferdinand Delbrück (1772–1848). And for what ideas are these figures credited?

Baumgarten is recognized as having understood aesthetic experience as a sensate mode of cognition involving obscure or confused mental representations – but not in the precise senses of 'dunkel' and 'verworren' that Bolzano himself had elaborated, partly in a critical response to Baumgarten. To put it briefly, what Bolzano alleges is that Baumgarten wrongly thought that distinctness was entirely a matter of having a clear representation of the elements of which

²¹ Bolzano, *Was ist Philosophie?*, 23.

a concept was composed, which leaves out the necessity of the higher-order intuitive knowledge that the concept in question is a compound of these elements. Bolzano allows that Baumgarten was broadly right to say that the object of contemplation is a unity within an array of qualities. But Bolzano does not accept the idea that this unity in multiplicity is a matter of perfection or completeness (*Vollkommenheit*). He thinks that the latter term carries various implications that would make the analysis too narrow. Not all unities are beautiful, nor are all perfect ones so; and not all beautiful unities have a purpose or goal in relation to which all of their parts must be organized; perfection is sometimes taken to entail a force, reality, or utility, which not all beautiful objects need possess. Bolzano further points out that the basic notion that beauty is a matter of unity in multiplicity can be traced all the way back to Pythagoras and St Augustine; the same idea was adopted by Francis Hutcheson, members of the Leibniz-Wolff school, and many others. So while Bolzano allows that Baumgarten was broadly on the right track with regard to two of Bolzano's conditions, Baumgarten's grasp of these very conditions is said to suffer significantly from a lack of precision.

At least a murky anticipation of another one of Bolzano's favoured ideas is attributed to Eberhard, who is said to have set forward the idea that beautiful objects must be such that they can set in motion 'ein leichtes Spiel der Seelenkräfte' (a light play of the mental powers). Bolzano is quick to add that the word 'play' (*Spiel*) is not the most correct way to say what needs saying in this connection. As Bolzano argues at some length in his discussion of Friedrich Schiller in § 41, he thinks that the word 'Spiel' is best used to refer to activities that are primarily if not exclusively motivated by the desire for relief from boredom, and he thinks Schiller and others define the term far too broadly. What Bolzano finds somewhat correct in Eberhard's idea of beauty is that various cognitive powers are active in the enjoyable contemplation of a beautiful object, the regularity of which is discerned without the agent's having to have recourse to the effort of clear and distinct thought. In our pleasurable experience of beauty we hit upon the beautiful pattern with fluency and ease, this very fluency and ease being a source of our pleasure.

Bolzano mentions Eberhard briefly and in passing, without giving a specific reference. A closer look at Eberhard's *Handbuch der Aesthetik*, which is most probably the work Bolzano had consulted, reveals some interesting details. Eberhard allows that following popular usage the warmth of the sun on our skin and the smell of a rose can be said to be beautiful. But in philosophy we require a narrower sense of the term, such that only some of our pleasurable experiences are responses to beauty. In this regard Eberhard's basic idea was that beauty is

only the object of the distinct (*deutliche*) senses, that is, those that reveal to us the parts and relations of which an object is composed. Thus the warmth of the sun on one's face may be pleasant on an otherwise chilly day without being beautiful.

Obviously Bolzano thinks Eberhard has grasped the wrong end of the stick in laying emphasis on *distinctness* of perception, since Bolzano's emphasis is instead on indistinctness or the extent to which an apt contemplation and enjoyment of beauty does not require an exhaustive analysis of the parts and relations that are constitutive of the object's unity in multiplicity. But the contrast between Bolzano and Eberhard in this regard is partly verbal. Bolzano must allow that an observer whose cognition of a complex object is *fully* indistinct cannot appropriately grasp that object or appreciate its beauty – such an unobservant observer would be unable to recognize any of the relevant part–whole relations. Like Eberhard, then, Bolzano thinks that the perception or cognition of part–whole relations is necessary to the contemplation of beauty. What Bolzano stresses, contra Eberhard, is that our enjoyment of beauty requires ease and fluency of cognition that does not involve the effort of analysis involved in other sorts of cognitive operations.

But there is another twist. Eberhard acknowledges that his idea of beauty had some ancient proponents. In this vein he mentions Plutarch, citing him, in German, as having written that 'beauty arises from diversity that is brought together in proportion and harmony in a light overview [*in eine leichte Übersicht zusammengefaßt wird*]:²² Strangely enough, there is nothing in Plutarch's Greek text (at least as we know it) – or in Kaltwasser's 1783 German translation of it – to be translated as 'eine leichte Übersicht' (a light overview), which expression figures explicitly in Eberhard's inaccurate German quotation.²³ This would appear, then, to have been Eberhard's innovation, misleadingly attributed to Plutarch. It was, however, an innovation that Bolzano ought to have favoured since it is suggestive of his own leading idea about beauty and includes none of the talk of the 'play' of the faculties that Bolzano was quick to contest.

Setting Eberhard aside, Bolzano turns to Delbrück's account of beauty.²⁴ Although Bolzano does not say so, Delbrück presents his investigation as an application of Kant's aesthetic doctrine to poetry. So it is slightly ironic that

²² Johann August Eberhard, *Handbuch der Aesthetik für gebildete Leser aus allen Ständen*, vol. 1, 2nd, rev. ed. (Halle: Hemmerde and Schwetschke, 1807), 60.

²³ See 'Die Schönheit entsteht aus dem Ebenmass und der Übereinstimmung, wenn zu gleicher Zeit viele Dinge gehörig zusammenstreffen', Johann Friedrich Salomon Kaltwasser, trans., *Plutarchs moralische Abhandlungen*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Hermann, 1783), 146.

²⁴ Johann Friedrich Ferdinand Delbrück, *Das Schöne, eine Untersuchung* (Berlin: Sander, 1800).

Bolzano the anti-Kantian should be listing the pro-Kantian Delbrück as one of his best antecedents. Yet it turns out that what Bolzano really likes in Delbrück is his un-Kantian elements. Moreover, Bolzano asserts that Delbrück's statements recall 'most' of the essential parts of Bolzano's own analysis of beauty, even if, when taken literally, they are 'faulty'. Delbrück is onto the fact that the beautiful object must, when contemplated, give us pleasure; Delbrück correctly notes that this requires the activation of our various cognitive powers, including the imagination, and that the cognition in question is 'light' in that it is a matter of 'divining' or guessing (*erraten*), not 'concluding' (*schließen*); and, finally, that we have no distinct awareness of the thoughts involved in our apprehension of a beautiful object. Bolzano's treatment of Delbrück's account is highly selective, however, and he does not even mention his great emphasis on the literary work's evocation of what Kant called 'aesthetic ideas', as well as various rhapsodic remarks about the ennobling spiritual benefits our experiences of poetic beauty can offer.

It should be pointed out in passing that Bolzano fails to credit Delbrück with an idea that Bolzano presents as his own in the first half of his essay – the distinction between two kinds of ugliness. The first kind of ugliness contrasts with the sort of beauty Bolzano places at the centre of his analysis, that is, the kind of regularity that affords a 'light', obscure, and confused cognition of a pleasing order. Bolzano offers as an example an unmotivated break in a rhyme scheme. The other sort of ugliness concerns a quality that is directly or immediately 'hateful' or repugnant. This is, one might add, not a matter of what is not beautiful, but of what is more generally unpleasant to perceive or think about. Delbrück had earlier drawn his distinction between types of ugliness as follows. Representations of what is loathsome or atrocious offend the senses and intellect respectively and so constitute one kind of ugliness, one of Delbrück's examples being Lucretius' vivid description of pestilence in book VI of *De rerum natura*.²⁵ The other sort of ugliness results from a flawed artistic design, such as a lack of reasonable motivation in the relations between thought and images.

The last philosopher whose analysis is presented by Bolzano as 'also' concurring with his own – and even more distinctly than those of the other precursors whom he mentions –, is Johann Maass.²⁶ Bolzano gives quite a few citations from Maass's book and then turns to some criticisms. Most notably, Bolzano disagrees with Maass's assumption that all beautiful objects must literally be perceptible, which wrongly rules out the existence of suprasensible or intelligible beauties. With regard to the idea that we must have a 'feeling of freedom' in our contemplation

²⁵ Ibid., 38–39.

²⁶ Johann Gebhard Ehrenreich Maass, *Grundriß der allgemeinen und besondern reinen Rhetorik* (Halle: Ruff, 1798).

of a beautiful object, Bolzano retorts that the only freedom we have in the cognition of beauty is that of guessing which unperceived qualities of the object may follow from those we have already noticed.

Readers who are fond of Kant's aesthetics, or who are aware of Kant's great influence, may wonder why Kant is not on the list of thinkers who got at least some of Bolzano's conditions of beauty at least approximately right. Answering that question would be a topic for a doctoral thesis; I shall be very brief.²⁷ Bolzano begins his discussion of Kant's aesthetics by pointing out that the four moments in Kant's analytic of the beautiful amount to a forced and unsuccessful effort on Kant's part to apply his table of the categories; it is far from evident, Bolzano complains, how the different moments stand in relation to each other. He finds Kant's presentation quite messy and thinks that some of the conditions do not belong under the rubrics where Kant has placed them. Such complaints aside, Bolzano contends more generally that Kant gives invalid arguments for unsound propositions regarding both the nature and status of judgements of beauty. Bolzano rejects the idea that such judgements possess a kind of subjective but universal validity (even less, necessity), and he contests the Kantian thesis that they are therefore fundamentally different from theoretical and practical judgements. Bolzano also rejects all of the key components of Kant's description of the conditions under which such judgements could occur, starting with the unusual Kantian explication of 'disinterestedness' or 'pleasure without interest' couched in terms of a pleasure arising with indifference to the (representation of the) existence of the object, and moving on to the idea of a concept-less free play of the faculties involving purposefulness without a purpose. He thinks Kant writes of 'purposefulness' and of the 'form of purposefulness' where 'regularity' would have been the appropriate notion. Bolzano finds it dubious if not incoherent to hold that when we appreciate and enjoy beauty we do so without concepts and must attribute to the object an 'as if' purposefulness that we know it does not have. If a very young child holding a piece of chalk were accidentally to make a mark that resembled a number, we might then be in a position to think of that behaviour 'as if' it were a purposeful, expressive gesture while knowing full well that it was not. This is not, however, a good paradigm for the way we perceive, think about, or imagine either natural or artistic beauties. When we appreciate the beauty of a rose, for example, we enjoy contemplating the actual arrangement of its qualities, perceiving some of them and imagining the arrangement of others we have not (yet) perceived. There is no need to motivate or guide this contemplation with imaginings of some intended goal or purpose that the rose does not actually have.

²⁷ For an able survey, see McCormick, 'Bolzano and the Dark Doctrine'.

Bolzano contends, contra Kant, that we have a legitimate interest in a representation of the existence of beautiful objects, if only because having a pleasurable representation of a beautiful object – which is what Kant stresses – is a lot easier to achieve if the object actually exists. We also have a justifiable interest in the existence of beautiful objects in the sense that we deem them worthy of our attention and may rightfully expect them to be of use, provided, that is, that they exist. Our pleasure in pure beauty as such is in no way contaminated or prevented by the existence of such interests. Bolzano can say this while also maintaining that the apt contemplation of beauty is incompatible with an exclusively possessive relation to the object, which means that there is a place in Bolzano's account for a sufficiently well-delimited notion of 'disinterestedness,' that is, one that rules out the causal influence of a possessive desire on our pleasurable contemplation of beauty. (This is the point of the Robinson Crusoe example in § 4 of Bolzano's essay.) There is, then, no good reason to follow Kant in holding that an apt judgement of beauty necessarily involves no pleasure derived from an interest in the object's existence or in the representation of it as existing. Bolzano thinks that Kant's assumptions rule out the existence of things that are both good and beautiful, or beautiful and agreeable, whereas Bolzano holds that such cases in fact obtain and merit our recognition. More generally, Bolzano acknowledges that in many cases there is a mixture of interests in our appreciation of things such that we take an interest in what he calls pure beauty – the primary object of his analysis in the essay – as well as in interest in moral, cognitive, and sensuous qualities.

V. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Bolzano devotes paragraphs §§ 19–25 to objections and replies. I shall not recapitulate his comments in these paragraphs, but will instead raise a few additional queries and objections and attempt Bolzano-inspired responses to them.

First objection. Bolzano starts out by saying that his goal in the treatise on beauty is to provide an explicit analysis of our ordinary usage of 'Schönheit' and related terms, thereby identifying a concept that we already know and use. He says that in order to avoid misunderstanding and confusion, each term should be correlated with only one concept. His goal in writing about beauty is accordingly to discover that one concept and to achieve a distinct representation of it, that is, one that identifies all of its components and their relations. Yet when we reach § 15 Bolzano appears to have given up on realizing this previously stated goal and instead presents his analysis as a philosophically or scientifically useful revisionary explication. Bolzano even says that in science it is not important whether there is any match between the scientific concept a term is used to

denote and the various subjective notions associated with the same word in ordinary usage. Bolzano comments in § 15 that we have no way of knowing what is really going on in the minds of all of the people who use the words 'beau', 'beautiful', and so on. So did Bolzano change his mind along the way about the main goal of his analysis?

Response. At the outset of the essay Bolzano does not simply write that he aims to explicate a concept that everyone already knows and uses. Instead he refers to a concept that everyone knows and uses *so long as* they use the word in its 'proper sense', the 'sense used in various textbooks in aesthetics' (B, §§ 1, 7). It is difficult to know which textbooks or treatises Bolzano was referring to here, but I surmise that one of them was Sulzer's encyclopaedic *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*.²⁸ Bolzano's initial statements about the aims and methods of conceptual analysis describe a philosophical ideal – the identification of the most useful unique objective concept that is referred to by the term 'beauty' in the context of aesthetics. The investigation of the concept of beauty that he develops stepwise in the course of the essay was duly guided by the pursuit of that ideal. Bolzano did not deny that there are vagaries in the popular usage of 'beauty' and related terms, just as he could hardly have any doubts about there having been many incompatible explications of different notions of beauty in the long history of the specialized philosophical literature on the topic. The very difficulty of explicating 'beauty' is even taken by him as a crucial cue to his emphasis on the role of obscure and indistinct thinking in our experience of beauty. The result of his analysis is proposed as a cogent, unitary, complex concept of beauty that covers uncontroversial instances of beauty referred to in popular and philosophical discourse. In fact Bolzano consistently maintains that he has identified a concept that is 'equivalent' if not identical to the concept referred to in aesthetics and in much of everyday discourse about beauty.

Second objection. Given his own premises, Bolzano's account has consequences he should find unacceptable. The first premise is that a person who enjoys beauty does not know what the source of this pleasure really is, and has an indistinct and dark idea of the matter. The second premise is that as far as the pleasure occasioned by a beautiful object goes, there is no introspectively noticeable difference between this pleasure and the pleasure that some other kind of object might occasion. The third premise is that beautiful objects often have various

²⁸ Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste: Lexikon der Künste und der Ästhetik*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Reich, 1771–74). Gatzemeier conjectures, on the basis of common errors, that Bolzano based some of his citations on Sulzer; see Matthias Gatzemeier, 'Einleitung', in *Bernard Bolzano-Gesamtausgabe I: Schriften*, vol. 18, *Mathematisch-Physikalische und Philosophische Schriften 1842–1843*, ed. Gottfried Gabriel, Matthias Gatzemeier, and Friedrich Kambartel (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog 1989), 94.

other positive qualities that people find pleasing, so for any given object that people find it pleasing to contemplate, we can reasonably ask whether the source of the pleasure is the object's pure beauty or some other factor – its attractiveness, agreeable qualities, its epistemic or other utility, and so forth. Does it not follow from these premises, along with reasonable assumptions about knowledge, that we cannot really know whether any particular object satisfies the proposed conditions on pure beauty? For example, and to mention a factor that Bolzano himself mentions, people who enjoy a musical performance and judge the composition beautiful may in fact be enjoying a sensuous pleasure in response to the particular timbre of the musician's voice, which is not a matter of 'pure beauty' at all. But how then could they – or anybody else – know whether the melody was purely beautiful?

Response. The objection brings a familiar and notoriously difficult more general problem to bear on Bolzano's discussion of beauty. Anyone who observes that there are differences between kinds of value (for example, moral, religious, or economic) should acknowledge that particular objects and events may have more than one kind of value (and disvalue) and that it can be very difficult or even impossible to come up with an overall or 'summative' evaluation of the diverse sorts of value a particular item manifests. In this regard, Bolzano's emphasis on the difference between pure beauty and cases where beauty is mixed in with other qualities can reasonably be seen as a virtue of his analysis in that he recognizes the problem without pretending to provide a simple solution or infallible discovery procedure.

As for the justification of individual claims about some object's beauty, Bolzano points out that while our pleasurable apprehension of beauty can be achieved without the 'effort of clear and distinct thought', it does not follow from this emphasis on the role of dark and confused ideas in the ordinary experience of beauty that it is impossible for anyone to have introspective access to the steps whereby beauty was recognized and enjoyed. In other words, that beauty is a darkly 'knowable' object does not entail for Bolzano that it cannot be known in other ways. Not only is accurate and sufficient introspection sometimes possible, it is not our only source of evidence on whether a particular object is beautiful.

Bolzano acknowledges, by the way, that 'such introspection is not for everyone, and is a capacity that can only be acquired if we have practised it from our youth on, and even then only if we have never permitted ourselves to *deliberately* conceal our innermost thoughts from ourselves' (*B*, § 1.4, p. 12; p. 234). Nor does Bolzano deny that in the majority of cases our enjoyment and judgement of an object's pure beauty is influenced by other factors. Yet in some cases when we reflect adequately on the cognitive process and relevant qualities of the object

we can have sufficient warrant to conclude that no other factors explain the experienced pleasure. This is what Bolzano tries to demonstrate in § 11 in his discussion of the beauty of a logarithmic spiral, the fable of the wolf and the lamb, and a riddle. Bolzano says that there are 'countless cases' where there is '*no other conceivable explanation*' of our pleasure (*B*, § 12, p. 20; p. 250). Our knowledge that these objects have pure beauty ultimately rests, then, upon an inference to the best explanation. This is not a proof, but Bolzano deems it a sufficient justification of the claim.

It may of course be further objected that Bolzano has not really surveyed all possible or even all conceivable explanations, and that what was deemed the best explanation by him could still be false. We can concede this point without allowing that there are no significant differences between specific cases with regard to the justification of claims about pure beauty in Bolzano's sense. Perhaps the objector makes the error of imposing inappropriately high standards of justification on claims about beauty. Even if not all conceivable rival explanations have been ruled out, in some cases all of the plausible and relevant ones can reasonably be cast in doubt, so that the sort of inference to the best explanation that Bolzano proposes remains viable. It is possible, for example, to find out whether a melody is enjoyed across transpositions, and whether enjoyment of a performance of the melody was primarily a response to the special virtuosity of a particular singer.

Third objection. Bolzano's official claim is that the 'matter' of his proposed explication is the objective concept of a universal pure beauty. 'Every educated person', he boldly asserts (*B*, § 14, p. 31; p. 252), has the same concept of beauty and can derive the same gratification from it. But in § 16.4 he distinguishes between recognizing and enjoying an object's beauty. Here he might have mentioned Jean-Pierre de Crousaz's disjunctive analysis in which beauty either gives us pleasure or occasions admiration *sans plaisir*.²⁹ Bolzano allows that sophisticated people with 'developed tastes' may only find pleasure in the contemplation of 'higher' forms of beauty, even though they may recognize that more simple objects are also beautiful; children and unsophisticated adults, on the other hand, can only enjoy the beauty of more simple objects, but they may nonetheless recognize that more complex objects are also beautiful. Bolzano mentions these variations because he wants to claim that his explication of beauty explains them, but it is not obvious how this works. How does his acknowledgement of such cases square with his strong claim about universality?

Response. It is coherent and perfectly plausible for Bolzano to say that sometimes an object's beauty can be recognized without being enjoyed. We do

²⁹ Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, *Traité du beau* (Amsterdam: L'Honoré, 1715).

not have to read de Crousaz to know that one could recognize that something is beautiful without being pleased by it. We might, for example, realize that a picture or a melody is beautiful, but be too unwell or depressed to enjoy contemplating it. In some cases someone's prior knowledge of a work's qualities, acquired through testimony or descriptions, could dampen or thwart that person's enjoyment of a work even though its beauty is recognized. For example, Bolzano says well-placed surprises can be beautiful, 'especially when the type of plot has led us to suspect that such surprises might come, even though we could never have guessed the particular nature of the surprise itself' (*B*, § 23.5, p. 43; p. 263). So 'spoilers' can reliably inform us about beautiful qualities of a work while preventing us from enjoying them.

With regard to the question of the universality of correct responses, Bolzano's condition requiring that *pleasure* be enjoyed through the contemplation of beauty is relative to a certain level of education and cognitive proficiency: for all x , x is beautiful only if the appropriate contemplation of x causes pleasure in all people whose cognitive faculties are sufficiently developed. Bolzano obviously does not make the dubious claim that all persons' cognitive faculties have in fact achieved the requisite level of cognitive proficiency, so the universality claim is compatible with divergent responses. There is indeed a problem for the analysis, however, if there are incompatible but appropriate hedonic responses to beauty amongst subjects who have the 'sufficient' level of cognitive development, since the definition entails that only objects enjoyed by *all* such subjects are beautiful. And as a matter of fact, it is just not the case that everybody who has a good aesthetic education actually enjoys beautiful things the same way every time they contemplate them. The way to defend Bolzano's claim against this objection is to point out that both the sophisticated and the less sophisticated subjects 'can' enjoy both simpler and more complex beautiful objects, at least in some sufficiently broad sense of 'can', even if particular responses fail to converge. So that, for example, if on a good day I can recognize and enjoy the beauty of some especially difficult music, it does not follow that all of my responses to that music must be in line with this ability of mine. Note as well that Bolzano allows for different modes of contemplation, and acknowledges that in some cases successful, pleasurable contemplation of beauty is only possible when the subject has worked hard to acquire sufficient background knowledge – for example, historical and linguistic knowledge that allows the reader of an ancient work to grasp its meanings, references, and allusions (*B*, § 20, p. 40; p. 260).

Fourth objection. In § 2.1 Bolzano says that he wants to stay neutral on the question of whether good and useful things are beautiful. Yet on the question of whether something evil could be beautiful, he takes a firm stance: 'I would also

like to make clear that I am of the conviction that nothing *evil* [*sittlich Bösen*] can be called beautiful, simply by virtue of the fact that it is evil' (*B*, § 2.1, p. 12; p. 235). Bolzano also says that 'non-moral beings can also be recognized as having some degree of beauty and that the sphere of the beautiful thus extends to all sorts of objects that do not fall into the sphere of the good' (*B*, § 2.1, p. 13; p. 235). How is this coherent, and how could Bolzano argue for his claim regarding the impossibility of beautiful evil?

Response. Bolzano's last quoted remark is compatible with his initial neutrality claim as long as 'non-moral' ('Wesen, die nicht zu den sittlichen gehören') is not mistakenly interpreted as 'immoral'. As for the impossibility of beautiful evil, this conclusion follows from Bolzano's account of beauty conjoined with some of his other assumptions. Here is how that argument might run: Bolzano assumes that the only source of evil is humankind's error.³⁰ He would allow that actual instances of ignorance, folly, or malice could be contemplated in a mixture of clear and obscure, distinct and indistinct cognitions. He gives an example of this when he describes how an observer might guess that someone was about to commit suicide (*B*, § 14, pp. 31–32; p. 253).³¹ The contemplation of evil could exercise and improve our cognitive proficiency, and so might be a source of pleasure, given Bolzano's other assumptions. But the correct moral attitude of disapprobation in response to ignorance, folly, or malice would normally overshadow or block any pleasure that might arise from the exercise of one's cognitive proficiency. Yet in some contexts, an improved knowledge of evil could be useful to achieve morally acceptable ends, in which case there might be nothing wrong with taking pleasure in such an improvement. Yet even in such cases, another person's folly, ignorance, or malice could not be admired or enjoyed by a moral contemplator, so there could be no 'transfer' of the source of our enjoyment to the object of contemplation, as Bolzano's analysis of beauty requires. It follows that given Bolzano's definition, evil has no 'beautiful flowers'.

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³⁰ For Bolzano's claim that the cause of evil is neither God nor nature, but human folly or malice, see Bernard Bolzano, 'Selected Exhortations', in *Selected Writings*, 51. In a kind of pragmatic theodicy, Bolzano claims that 'for the sake of our peace of mind, and to avoid falling into a misanthropic funk, we must believe that ignorance and error alone are the ultimate cause of all evil' (*ibid.*). This is from a sermon of 1817.

³¹ For Bolzano's explanation why 'reason and Christianity' condemn suicide, see Bernard Bolzano, *Athanasia, oder Gründe für die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, 2nd, rev. ed. (Sulzbach: Seidel, 1838), 273.

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BERNARD BOLZANO: ON THE CONCEPT OF THE BEAUTIFUL: A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY

PREFACE

The fact that I have decided to fill so many pages with the analysis of a single concept may for some seem to demand explanation. I can only reply that this concept seems to me to be of particular importance; and further, that the analysis of concepts is a matter that always demands expansive inquiries if one is to go beyond merely *saying* that the concept is reducible to its parts and actually convince the reader, thus also taking care to demonstrate that the attempts at explicating the concept that have been made thus far are lacking in one way or another. After I have completed this essay on the fundamental concept of *aesthetics*, I will not deem it necessary to proceed with such thoroughness in the essays that follow.

I

In this essay I will seek to *explicate* or *define* a concept known and used by us all – namely, the concept that we denote with the word ‘beautiful’, so long as we understand this word in its proper sense, the sense used in various *treatises on aesthetics*. By ‘explicating’ or ‘defining’ I understand nothing other than establishing whether the concept of the beautiful is simple or complex, and, if it happens to be complex, determining the other concepts it is composed of and their specific relations to one another. Thus, I hardly aim to forge some new concept wholly unknown to my readers. Rather, I simply aim to elucidate the constituents [*Bestandteile*] of a concept that they, in their own minds, have already formed, even though they may not have a clear idea of how they formed it or may have simply forgotten. We can find numerous examples of the fact that we are sometimes unable to clearly explicate each and every part of a concept¹ that we ourselves have developed. How else are we to explain the fact that we are so often stumped when someone asks us to explain what we mean when we use a certain concept, even one we make use of every day? And how to explain the fact that we are so seldom able to agree on the definition of such concepts? Is it even necessary for me to say that the concept of the *beautiful* belongs to those

[The following translation is based on the original 1843 text, Bernard Bolzano, *Abhandlungen zur Ästhetik: Erste Lieferung; Über den Begriff des Schönen. Eine philosophische Abhandlung* (Prague: Borrosch et André, 1843). Only the first half of the essay (§§ 1–25) is translated. The footnotes in square brackets are the translator’s.]

¹ [*Begriff* is translated throughout as ‘concept’ even in those places where it seems that ‘term’ might be more fitting.]



concepts the meaning of which is contested, and the clarification of which has been attempted so many times? Or that it is generally seen as one of the most difficult concepts? Of course, in the following essay I will view it as my duty to refer to the most important among these attempts and to show why I have not been able to remain satisfied with any of them.²

But before beginning my analysis of the concept of the beautiful, it seems necessary for me to make my readers aware of some presuppositions that will inform my entire investigation, because if they are unable to agree with me on these points, then it is hardly to be expected that they will agree with me on anything that follows.

1. When meditating on some object, or when thinking in general, we often *alter* our thoughts, going from one thought to the next or from one judgement to its *opposite*. Such alterations might be called *shifts in our thoughts*, shifts which in a certain sense are not harmful, and are even unavoidable if we want to increase or improve our knowledge. However, it is impossible to speak of such *shifts* or *alterations* when discussing what I call *propositions and truths in themselves* or *objective truths and propositions*, or, similarly, when discussing what I call *concepts and representations in themselves* or *objective concepts and representations*.³ It is a very simple matter to draw a distinction between propositions and representations *in themselves* (or *objective* propositions and representations) and *subjective* or *thought* propositions and representations (judgements and so forth), which are simply the forms in which the former *appear* in the minds of thinking beings. The simplicity of making this distinction is evidenced by the fact that everyone has some understanding of it. For example, everyone understands me when I say, 'In philosophy, there is only one *concept in itself* designated by the word *God*, even though there are an infinite number of different *concepts* and *ideas*, some clearer than others, some false, which individual *human beings* associate with this word'. In the first part of the sentence, I spoke of the concept of God in its objective meaning, in the latter in its subjective meaning. Even though this distinction makes itself known to us in various ways, it has yet to be elucidated. Most importantly, the distinguishing features of objective propositions and ideas remain to be subjected to rigorous philosophical analysis. That there is such a lack has been made particularly clear by the fact that the attempts I have made to address myself to these problems in the first two volumes of my *Theory of Science* remain the only attempts to

² [Bolzano's detailed engagement with the literature takes up the entire second half of his essay on beauty (§§ 26–57). It is not included in this translation.]

³ [See Bernard Bolzano, *The Theory of Science*, vol. 1, trans. Paul Rusnock and Rolf George (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 58–114.]

do so.⁴ If this distinction is understood and admitted, one will, it is hoped, grant that, although *thought* propositions and ideas can be altered and change into their opposite (because they are thought by particular thinking beings at particular points in time), *propositions in themselves* and their constituents, the *concepts and ideas in themselves*, are not subject to change, because they do not have the attributes of *being, existence, or actuality*. Thus, so long as we seek to discuss *concepts* and *ideas* in their *objective sense*, we may never speak of a transition of one concept to another, of a concept turning into its opposite, or of a *dialectical progression* of such concepts and ideas. As our current aim is to define the concept of the *beautiful*, we must shift our focus away from the subjective, alterable concept that we have associated with this word in the various phases of our lives, as children, adolescents, and so forth, and turn our attention towards the one unchangeable concept that is and should be denoted by the word's use in textbooks on aesthetics. As such, we are dealing with nothing other than the determination of a *concept in the objective sense*, although if we are to be able to make judgements about this concept at all, it must certainly appear to us in our minds, that is, as a subjective concept. The concept to be defined in this essay – that is, the concept that is to be broken up into its constituents (if it is, indeed, a complex concept) – is a *concept in itself*. As such, we have no reason to speak of the concept's movement, of its gradual transition into another concept, of its sudden shift into its opposite, or of anything of the sort.

2. If we want to safeguard our thinking from error and keep ourselves from being responsible for others misunderstanding us, confusing them more than teaching them anything, then we must avoid using one and the same word to denote one thing one minute and another thing the next; that is, we must avoid using the same word to denote first one concept, then another. Thus, we may only develop a single *elucidation or definition* of each one of our *words*, or, more precisely, we may only develop a single definition of the *concepts denoted* by them. It is a miserable state of affairs when philosophers (particularly those of recent times, such as I. H. Fichte⁵ when defining the concept of the *absolute*) give us *multiple definitions* of one and the same *word or concept*, believing that

⁴ And nonetheless, I believe this attempt clearly shows that the *proton pseudos* of recent philosophy has been occasioned by the lack of a clear notion of the *concept in itself*, the latter having been at once confused with *thoughts*, then with the *things* that are its object.

⁵ [The original text has 'J. H. Fichte' here. I follow the Athenäum edition in opting for I. H. Fichte, but it seems that J. G. Fichte is also plausible, since Bolzano criticizes the latter for his inability to become 'distinctly conscious' of his own thoughts in § XLV (not included in this partial translation). See Bernard Bolzano, *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, ed. Dietfried Gerhardus (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972), 7.]

a second definition is *richer in content* than the one that preceded it or that the one definition follows from one *perspective*, the other from another *perspective*. Contrary to what they claim, it is not one and the same concept. Rather, it is clear that these philosophers want to denote multiple concepts with a single word in a way that must result in nothing but confusion. Similarly, it is clear that the definitions they give do not diverge from one another simply in the purely contingent expressions they are couched in or in their varying degrees of rigour, as if the one definition contained merely the most readily apparent parts of the concept, the other elaborating on its finer points. Even if the divergent definitions were definitions of those concepts that I call *equivalent or interchangeable concepts*,⁶ that is, concepts that encompass the same objects, they would still be *different* concepts. Thus, it is an error to confuse them with one another, viewing them as one rather than considering their intrinsic, often very significant differences. To draw a comparison with a science that for millennia has been seen as an unattained, even unattainable ideal for all the others, it has never been permitted in mathematics to treat mutually inclusive concepts as definitions of one and the same concept, which would be like saying that the concept of a quadrilateral with *sides of equal length* and the concept of a quadrilateral with *parallel sides* are both definitions of one and the same concept – namely, that of the parallelogram. Rather, mathematics takes up one of these concepts as a definition and then demonstrates that the other concept has the same extension. Let us work with the same precision when attempting to define the concept of the beautiful. And when we have reached the point where we believe we have found a definition that corresponds with our understanding of this concept, let us not follow the same path as those who amend their definitions with a second and a third, claiming that it is also possible to come up with the same concept by combining certain other attributes which differ from those that the definition originally contained.

3. That concepts (or representations in general) can be divided into the *simple* and the *complex*, the latter being a specific way of relating the former to one another, is not a sign of barbarity (as *Hegel* liked to say). Rather, it is a doctrine wholly in line with truth, a doctrine confirmed by our innermost consciousness and by the most pregnant examples. Does not our own mind tell us that some concepts can only be got at by combining various other concepts with one another? For instance, you see a clay jar the colour or fragility of which reminds you of various items you recently saw that were made out of India rubber. You are certain, however, that these two ideas taken together result in the idea

⁶ [See Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, § 96b, 320.]

of a jar made of India rubber instead of clay. Thus, combining the concepts of India rubber and jar you get the concept of an *elastic jar*. Of course, we do not always have a lucid idea of the constituents of complex concepts. This is particularly the case with concepts we developed in early childhood, concepts that we gradually acquired rather than having learned in a single stroke, or words the meaning of which we only deciphered after hearing them used many times. But we cannot seriously doubt the fact that all these concepts must either be simple or composed of other concepts (to which some sensory impressions might be added). This is true because if we are unable to view a representation as simple, then what else could it consist of but other representations? We certainly cannot permit ourselves to be coaxed into the conviction still held by many logicians that every *attribute* [*Merkmal*] of the *object* of a concept must also be a *constituent of the concept itself*. Although it is certainly true that a large part of the constituents of a concept represent certain general attributes of the object, it cannot be true that every concept containing a representation of the qualities [*Beschaffenheiten*] of certain objects is itself a constituent of the concept of these objects. That cannot be true simply because if it were, then the content of every concept would be endless, because the set of qualities of every single object, and even every species of objects, is endless. For instance, the concept of a 'human body' is simply the concept of the body of human beings, that is, of sensible, rational creatures who inhabit the earth. We certainly have a concept of this body's qualities when we consider the fact that it has such and such limbs and organs, and these qualities are certainly part of the object understood by the concept of a human body. But these qualities are in no way referred to in the content of this concept. Thus, if we take it upon ourselves to define a concept, then we must first determine whether this concept is simple or complex. If it is complex, we must then enumerate the *sum of its constituents*, but in no way the *sum of the qualities* shared by its objects. We only need to list those qualities actually contained in the concept itself. Our definition of the concept of *the beautiful* will proceed in the same way. We must determine whether the concept is simple or complex, but it is in no way our duty to elucidate the *entirety* of the qualities of the beautiful. It is wholly sufficient if those qualities not taken up by our definition can be deduced from it.

4. From what has been said thus far it should be readily apparent that defining a *concept in itself*, such as the concept of the beautiful, is no easy task, nor is convincing others of the correctness of such a definition. If we claim that the concept in question is *simple*, then we can only defend this claim by demonstrating that any attempt to produce this concept by means of combining other concepts with one another is destined to fail. And we can only do this in

two ways: either by showing that such attempts are ultimately circular, that they contain the unanalysed concept in the definition of the concept itself, or by showing that they end up defining a concept wholly different from the concept in question. On the other hand, if we claim that the concept in question is complex, explicating its constituents and the ways they stand in relation to one another, then we are obliged to demonstrate that the extension of the concept resulting from the combination of these parts is neither *lesser* nor *greater* than the concept we set out to elucidate. We can only prove this by showing that the concept we have analysed can be applied to each and every object contained by the concept in question, no more and no less. This we can only do by showing: (1) that every property attributed to the objects of the concept in question can also be deduced from our concept, and, conversely, (2) that every quality that can be deduced from our concept can be found in the objects of the concept in question. And even if we accomplish all of this, we still have not demonstrated that our concept really correlates with the concept in question, because they could be mere *equivalent concepts*. The only means we have to free ourselves of this last bit of doubt and *convince ourselves* is to inquire as to whether our understanding finds the concept adequate. And the only way we can *convince our reader* is to ask him to do the same. The only way to make such an inquiry is to undertake such rigorous introspection that we become aware of the thought processes activated in us by the concept in question. This makes it possible for us to ask whether these thoughts correspond with or diverge from our concept. We can assume with greater probability that we have come across the right definition the more we engage in such introspection and the more convinced we become that our concept corresponds exclusively with the thoughts activated by the concept in question. But such introspection is not for everyone, and is a capacity that can only be acquired if we have practised it from our youth on, and even then only if we have never permitted ourselves to *deliberately* conceal our innermost thoughts from ourselves. The man who has never undertaken such intense introspection or who has never had the good intention of doing so will always contradict what we say. And in a certain sense, he will be right in claiming that his mind has no notion of that which we have developed in our explication. This is the sort of predicament we are faced with when the last bastion of proof lies in our consciousness alone. But we can at least find some solace in the fact that, when developing concepts *in a scholarly context*, it is of little consequence if the concept we develop in our explication does not wholly correspond with the concept that we have always denoted with the same word. What is most important is that the concept has a pragmatic function and that it deserves to serve as a foundation for the disciplines concerned with its object. This matter is

wholly separate from our undertaking here, and, fortunately, we are usually capable of making a judgement about it in a very transparent way that will dispel any reservations the reader might still have.

II

Now that these preliminary considerations are over with I would like to begin my analysis of the concept of the beautiful with some *negative propositions*, simply in order to get some things that *are not contained* in this concept out of the way. The concept of the beautiful has nothing to do with the concept of the *good*, nor with that of the *agreeable* [*Angenehmen*], nor with that of the *charming* [*Reizenden*], and this to such a degree that none of these concepts has the same *extension* as that of the beautiful. This is to say that none of them are *equivalent concepts* of the beautiful, not to speak of the impossibility of them having the same constituents (the same *content*).⁷

1. Concerning the *good*: I wish neither to affirm nor to contest the fact that all *truly good* or *ethical* things possess some sort of beauty. I would also like to make clear that I am of the conviction that nothing *evil* can be called beautiful, simply by virtue of the fact that it is evil. Nevertheless, the difference between the sphere of the beautiful and that of the good is so great that we must not lose sight of it. And from this it follows, of course, that the constituents of these concepts must also differ from one another. It is undeniable that we find many objects beautiful without associating them with the laws of morality in any way whatsoever. Who would claim that our wonder when contemplating the beauty of some sight, of a building, a flower, or the harmony of music compels us to find some sign of the laws of morality in these same objects, or that we only find these objects *beautiful* because of their moral content? It might be true that the most perfect beauty may only be attributed to beings who, like human beings and other higher spirits, are not only capable of attaining moral perfection, but also actually attain it. And we should be praised when we are able to keep ourselves from being bedazzled by the beauty of people who nevertheless lack moral sensibility. But we should not believe that our virtues are diminished if we admit that non-moral beings can also be recognized as having some degree of beauty and that the sphere of the beautiful thus extends to all sorts of objects that do not fall into the sphere of the good.

2. The difference between the concepts of the *beautiful* and the *agreeable* is no less apparent. If we do not take the concept of the *agreeable* in the same way as Kant, who goes against the word's everyday use by limiting it to 'that which

⁷ [In § 119 of the *Theory of Science*, Bolzano develops a distinction between the 'content' and the 'matter' of a concept. See Bolzano, *Theory of Science*, 403–9.]

pleases the senses in sensation⁸ (which we could call *sensory agreeableness*), then the concept extends to every object that *gratifies or pleases* us for any reason whatsoever, that is, every object that causes pleasure in us. We no doubt presume that everything *beautiful* is capable of bringing us gratification or pleasure under certain circumstances – namely, when we direct our attention towards it and contemplate it. And we certainly do not feel compelled to call things beautiful that are wholly incapable of bringing us any sort of pleasure. The beautiful is thus indisputably an object that *could be agreeable*, even if it is not in fact agreeable. But the reverse – namely, that everything that can be agreeable deserves to be called beautiful – does not hold. Those familiar with the authentic sense of the word in no way consider beautiful those things that are merely agreeable to our *senses*, things that do not demand any higher capacities than those we attribute to *animals*, fascinating us by the impressions they make on our senses. They thus deem it false when somebody claims, for instance, that the taste of an apple is beautiful merely because it is agreeable to the senses. Thus, the concept of the *agreeable*, or even the concept of that *which can be agreeable*, has the same relation to the concept of the beautiful as a higher concept does to a lower one.

3. Despite what Kant says, I have no reservations about claiming that all, or at least most, beautiful objects are *charming* to a certain degree, and that they thus evoke a certain *desire* in us. What is more natural than to desire the repetition of a pleasure afforded to us by an object we have deemed beautiful? If the presence of the beautiful object is necessary for us to obtain an adequate representation of it, this desire will bring about the further desire to have that object in our reach. Thus, if we call everything that leaves us with a certain desire *charming*, then we will have a hard time disputing the fact that beautiful objects are also attractive objects; ‘the charm of beauty’ is indeed a most common expression. But the reverse does not hold; that not every charming object is beautiful need not be expounded upon. The number of objects that charm our senses and that nobody who understands the concept of beauty would call beautiful is no doubt endless!

III

But if it is true that everything beautiful can be a source of gratification for us, and that it can be *agreeable* under certain circumstances, then we must ask in what way or for what reasons can a beautiful object bring us enjoyment if it indeed deserves to be called a *beautiful* object, and what conditions must be

⁸ [Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), § 3, 91 (AA 5:205).]

met so that we may rightfully call it beautiful. I believe it is correct to say that this enjoyment can be brought about in no other way than the mere *contemplation* of the object. If we want to make a judgement regarding the *pure* beauty of an object then we must leave aside many things: all the sensations the object can cause in us when we allow it to affect us to a degree beyond that necessary to obtain a mere *representation* of it; all the sensations that arise in us when we permit the object to affect us in a way beyond that necessary for the object's mere contemplation; and, finally, the possibility of *altering* the object in some arbitrary way, *relating* it to ourselves, and so forth. We must dedicate ourselves to the question as to whether the mere *representation* of the object that arises out of our contemplation of it is sufficient to gratify us. If it is not capable of doing so, then we may call the object many things, but not *beautiful*.

IV

Should not this attribute of the beautiful be considered a constituent of the concept of the beautiful? Further, does it not make up the entirety of the concept itself? In that case, every object capable of gratifying us by its mere contemplation would have to be called beautiful. Is this true? I do not think so. I think there are countless things the mere contemplation of which gratifies us without us being able to attribute even the slightest bit of beauty to them: all things agreeable to our *senses*; all things which promise us some *benefit*. We view these things with a more or less pleasurable feeling, but do we call these things beautiful for that reason? It was certainly with the greatest joy that Campe's Robinson viewed the jagged stone with an oblong hole bored into it that he found on his island.⁹ He might have called this find *precious*, *grand*, even *incomparable*, but he would certainly not have called this object *beautiful*, at least not in the sense of the word used in aesthetics. Thus it is clear that the concept that results from this single attribute of the beautiful is much too broad, and that we must therefore limit our concept in some way by adding more attributes. We can find more attributes in two ways: either by closely examining the *characteristics* of the contemplation occasioned by beautiful objects or by trying to give a more precise account of the *type of pleasure* that we experience when contemplating a beautiful object, in that we attempt, for instance, to identify the specific *reason* why we experience this pleasure. Possibly, however, our investigation will have to take up both lines of inquiry.

⁹ [Bolzano refers here to Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere* (1779/80), an adaptation for children of Defoe's novel.]



V

Let us first direct our attention towards the *particular characteristics* of the contemplation of beautiful objects; that is, let us ask what the *content* of this contemplation is. What aspects of an object do our thoughts engage with such that we experience the beauty of that object? The mere fact that the answer to this question is not universally known and that we can thus raise it as a legitimate question reveals a *peculiarity* of the sort of contemplation in question. It demonstrates that the thoughts involved in our contemplation of the beautiful must be formed with such swiftness and ease *that we, in most cases, are not distinctly conscious of them* [*dass sie uns in den gewöhnlichen Fällen gar nicht zu einem deutlichen Bewusstsein gelangt*]. Consider what it would be like if we were capable of once again bringing to consciousness the representations, judgements, and inferences involved in contemplating a beautiful object, *saying to ourselves that we have these thoughts*. Would not everybody then be able to say precisely what aspects of an object our thoughts engage with when we find that object beautiful? Or would we at least be able to recall just those thoughts *common to all* our contemplations of beautiful objects? So this too must be an attribute of the beautiful: we derive gratification from the contemplation of beautiful objects, *a contemplation formed with such ease and swiftness that we need not be distinctly conscious of the thoughts involved in it*. In expressing myself in this way I also wish to state that I do not believe that a beautiful object stops gratifying us if we consciously articulate all the thoughts involved in its contemplation. This is certainly not true, even if many have expressed themselves this way and a few have really thought it to be true. I simply wish to make the claim that an essential aspect of the beautiful is that the thoughts evoked by the beautiful object develop with such ease that we are capable of thinking these thoughts to their end without having *to be conscious* of every single one for itself. In other words, we must be able to think these thoughts to their end without having to make a judgement about each one for itself or even having to make each thought the object of an intuition. I think that this is a necessary aspect of that specific sort of pleasure derived from contemplating beautiful objects, which we call *pleasure in the beautiful*. If, on the contrary, the thoughts occasioned by an object are very cumbersome and difficult, if we have to be clearly conscious of all the judgements and inferences involved, then we hardly think of pleasure, or at least not of the *pleasure in the beautiful*. If one is willing to grant me this point, then one admits that the attribute of beauty discussed here is a *universally valid* attribute. However, determining whether this attribute is a *constituent* of the concept of the beautiful is contingent upon the consideration of two factors: we must ask ourselves whether the concept that results from this attribute's



combination with the constituents we have already named is not *redundant*. Or, if the concept's extension is too broad, we must ask ourselves whether the attributes that remain to be determined are merely going to end up being burdensome additions that contribute nothing substantial to the concept itself. The concept that results from this combination can be defined as follows: we may call that object *beautiful* which pleases us by its mere contemplation, a contemplation which we carry out with *such ease that we need not be distinctly conscious of all the individual thoughts involved in it*. One can hardly claim that this definition contains superfluous parts (beyond the *words* themselves, where it is in a certain sense impossible to avoid superfluity if one does not wish to break all the rules of grammar and usage). It is also clear, however, that the concept's extension is too broad, because it is certainly not true that every object that pleases us by its mere contemplation should be called beautiful (even if we carry out this contemplation swiftly and with ease). Our friend Robinson did not need to arduously mull over all the important things that stone could do for him. He will have certainly derived pleasure from viewing the stone without, as we said, calling it beautiful.

VI

Thus, we must seek out more attributes in order to properly define the concept of the beautiful. Looking back at the way we discovered the attribute of the beautiful explicated in the previous section, it is clear that we did not attempt to answer the question that we tasked ourselves with at the beginning of that section, but simply asked how posing such a question was possible in the first place. We asked: what is the *content* of the contemplation that the enjoyment of the beautiful occasions us to engage in? The very fact that we were able to pose this question led us to the following conclusion: it must be the case that we do not have a distinct consciousness of the thought processes involved in such contemplation. But this feature of the beautiful only touches upon the *form* of our contemplation, saying nothing about its *content*. Nevertheless, we should welcome this insight, because it reveals an important attribute of the beautiful. As it is clear that we have not explicated all the attributes of the concept in question, it seems reasonable that we make a serious attempt to see if we are not able to answer the question we posed to ourselves, because every correct answer we are able to give will reveal another attribute of the beautiful. So, if in contemplating a beautiful object we merely contemplate its beauty and nothing else, what exactly are our thoughts occupied with in this contemplation? The first answer I would like to give to this question is merely a negative determination: when enjoying the beautiful, *our thoughts are not simply occupied with a relation*

that the object has to us as individuals. Thus, it is clear that whenever we call an object *beautiful*, we do not do so simply on the basis of a *relation that it has to us alone as individuals*. Rather, we always believe ourselves justified in maintaining the expectation that others who stand in a wholly different relation to the object can and should find the object beautiful too. As *Kant* has shown, all aestheticians presume (and their entire academic discipline rests on this presumption) that *our judgements about beauty make a certain claim to universal validity*, but, I emphasize, only a *certain* claim to universal validity. It is clear that determining the nature of this *universal validity* will greatly aid us in finding the true concept of the beautiful. But no aesthetician has ever made the claim that every object we *human beings* find beautiful must also be *felt* to be beautiful by all other sensory beings without exception. It has always been almost universally agreed upon that beings on a lower level than human beings, namely animals, have no sense for the feeling of the beautiful. Most also agree that there are many significant differences in the subtlety and correctness of tastes from one person to the next. Moreover, most also agree that the capacity to make judgements about the beautiful, and thus the capacity to derive enjoyment from the contemplation of the same, can only be gradually acquired and thus naturally demands that we *educate* our cognitive faculties and that we *train* our capacity to judge. Finally, as regards *higher spiritual beings*, one has never risked claiming that they have no *knowledge* of the beautiful, and are therefore incapable of making judgements about it and distinguishing it from its opposite. But most have doubted whether the contemplation of the beautiful would bring them any *pleasure*. Some have gone even further, not simply doubting this fact, but decisively denying it.¹⁰ Only in the following sections will we be able to determine whether we should integrate some or even all of the hitherto outlined attributes into our concept of the beautiful, thus granting them the status of *constituents*. But one thing is clear: the remarks made so far have certainly provided us with useful insights into the essence of the beautiful. In this regard, we may sum up the two types of considerations we have ventured to make: the first has to do with the *content* of the contemplation occasioned by a beautiful object, whereas the second has to do with the *source* of the pleasure we experience when

¹⁰ Who wouldn't think of the words of that man who was one of the most discerning judges of the beautiful but was also one of the great masters of producing it? 'Your *knowledge* you do share with spirit minds far vaster, / 'Tis *Art*, O Man, you have alone!' [Bolzano's emphasis, Friedrich Schiller, 'The Artists' (1789), translated by Marianna Wertz, *The Schiller Institute*, http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/trans_schil_1poems.html#the_artist.] By *Art* one must understand only that art which has to do with *feeling*. Only the pleasure that accompanies the contemplation of the beautiful is an exclusive characteristic of our species.

contemplating the beautiful. Concerning the content of this contemplation, we assume that man must first develop his cognitive faculties in order to be able to enjoy the contemplation of the beautiful and to make judgements about it. Concerning the source of this gratification, we assume that cognitive faculties *much higher* than those of man might not weaken the capacity to make *judgements* about the beautiful, but most certainly diminish or even nullify the capacity to derive *gratification* from it. If we admit both of these assumptions and attempt to discover their cause, then we will certainly be able to make important inferences concerning the *content* of our contemplation of beautiful objects and the *source* of the pleasure derived from it. Let us attempt both.

VII

We again raise the question: what exactly are our thoughts occupied with when we contemplate the beautiful? But let us now consider the question in light of the fact that we first obtain the capacity to judge and enjoy the beautiful only after we have educated our minds and trained our faculties. First of all, let us ask: what do we do when contemplating an object that does not serve us as a means of satisfying our immediate needs? What do we do when engaging in contemplation that we intend to be nothing other than *mere contemplation*? In such situations we set ourselves the task of determining *what exactly the thing we have before us is*. But asking what a thing is means nothing more than looking for a *concept* (or, what is ultimately the same, for a *representation* or *rule*) from which the features of the thing can be deduced. Thus, should not the task we set for ourselves when contemplating a *beautiful* object be exactly the same? Should we (whether or not we are fully aware of it) not attempt to come up with a concept that contains the entirety of the object's features, either directly or in such a way that they can be readily inferred from it? When contemplating a beautiful object, we may certainly form such a concept or representation. But we must be more precise and ask whether the representation is *simple* or *complex*. If it is simple, we must ask whether this representation is one that *exclusively* represents the object being considered and nothing else, that is, whether a mere *intuition* of the object is sufficient. And if it is complex, we must ask whether this complex representation is a *composite* or a *pure* concept. This matter clarifies itself when we take into account the fact we are dealing with here. This shows us clearly that mere *intuitions* are insufficient for conceptualizing beautiful objects, because children and even animals can have mere intuitions. If our contemplation of the beautiful and our ability to distinguish it from its opposite were based on nothing but mere intuitions, we would be forced to admit that children and even animals have an eye for the beautiful. However, there is only one conclusion to be drawn from

the assumption that the contemplation of the beautiful presupposes that our faculties of cognition be developed and educated – namely, that such contemplation sets all of our faculties of knowledge in motion, our *faculty of intuition* together with our *memory*, our *power of imagination*, our *understanding*, our *power of judgement*, and even our *faculty of reason*.¹¹ In order to recognize a beautiful object as such, we must begin with the *intuitions* related to it (if indeed it is an object that can be perceived with the senses). But we must also subsume these intuitions under *concepts of the understanding*, showing that their object has such and such *qualities*. We must therefore not allow ourselves to be satisfied with an explication of the *perceived qualities*. We must also use our *power of imagination* to represent certain other qualities, such that by combining the latter with the former, we obtain a *concept* (pure or composite) from which the rest of the object's qualities can be deduced, including those revealed to us by focused observation. But when forming a concept we must not allow ourselves to be guided by mere chance. Rather, we must use our *faculties of judgement and reason* in order to carefully select the most adequate features from those that our imagination presents us with. And all of that must be carried out so swiftly and with such ease that we need not be distinctly conscious of the entire process, saying to ourselves that we are doing it. We learned in § V how correct this is. But in truth, only after having explained all of this does it become clear why we only *gradually* obtain the capacity to appreciate the beautiful and experience it with pleasure, why the development of this capacity requires both the *development* of our powers (especially our cognitive faculties) and *training*. Because only an imagination capable of imagining a *plethora of various features* will be able to develop an adequate image of the object in question. Only well-developed *faculties of judgement and reason* will be able to know which of the imagined qualities the object really has. Only a mind that has practice engaging in such contemplation will be able to conceptualize the object with such swiftness and ease that it need not be distinctly conscious of all the individual representations, judgements, and inferences involved.

VIII

We set out to determine the *content* of the contemplation that accompanies our enjoyment of the beautiful – whether we are distinctly conscious of this content

¹¹ Listing so many *faculties of mind* is, I hope, justified by what I have said elsewhere on the topic, particularly in my *Theory of Science*. The prejudice that one has *explained* a particular thing by merely conceptualizing the *faculty* that brings it forth has been particularly ruinous for some academic disciplines, especially *psychology*. On the other hand, it is equally true that those who want to hear nothing of *faculties* in the plural, whether those of simple beings or the mind, go too far.

or not. We discovered another universally valid attribute of the beautiful. Let us now find out whether combining it with the results of our inquiry up to this point allows us to sufficiently define the concept of the beautiful. This will allow us to continue on to our second task (§ VI), presuming that there is a demonstrated need to do so. I will demonstrate that there is indeed such a need by showing that even if we combine all the attributes developed thus far, the concept that results is still too broad. If there is one single object that has the sum of these attributes but which itself is not beautiful, then the need to continue our inquiry will have been demonstrated. I hope that my readers will accept the claim that every faithful depiction of a historically important person in an image is an example of such an object, even though it may itself be in no way beautiful. If the original was not beautiful, then there is no way we will be able to find its image beautiful (so long as it is faithful to the original). And yet such an image may have all of the attributes we have described thus far. Nobody will dispute the fact that contemplating such an image pleases us in a certain way: on the one hand, a faithful representation of the facial features of such a remarkable person expands and confirms our physiognomic knowledge; on the other hand it allows us to make certain inferences about that person's character. Equally indisputable is the fact that we need not have a distinct consciousness of all the thoughts that fleetingly move through our minds when we contemplate such an image; after all, we are not always capable of readily identifying the features in which we recognize various character traits. And just as certain is the fact that the gratification derived from contemplating such an image does not have its roots in the particular relation that the image has to us as individuals: the image does not please us by granting us a personal benefit, but by satisfying an interest that thousands could and should have. Thus, as with a beautiful object, we may also demand that every educated person experience the existence and, indeed, the contemplation of such an image with pleasure. My readers will certainly admit that a portrait is no simple object, containing as it does a whole series of qualities that do not mutually determine one another; they will thus also admit that formulating a concept of such an object is no easy task. The point is made clearer if we demand that the contemplating person grasp the *singularity* and *significance* of every facial feature, which for its part necessitates the concentration of all our cognitive faculties and a great deal of experience and training. This alone demonstrates that our investigation has not yet provided us with enough attributes to form a concept that would have even the same extension as the concept of the beautiful in question. We must therefore continue our search. To this end the best we can do is to carry out the task we set for ourselves.

IX

As our goal now is to investigate the *sources of the gratification derived from the beautiful*, it seems appropriate first to raise the question: *what in general can serve as a source of pleasure and gratification for us and for all other finite beings?* We may only speak of *finite* beings here, that is, beings whose capacities are limited. The *infinite and perfect being* must be treated altogether differently from His creations, the finite beings, even though we may think of Him as a *feeling being* possessing *supreme blessedness*. We are certainly correct when we conceive of *God's blessedness* as an unchanging, self-contained blessedness grounded in the consciousness of itself, such that we can find nothing *outside it* that would augment or diminish it. Our limited capacities, by contrast, are alternately augmented and diminished. Now, I claim that the *augmentation* of our capacities is experienced as *pleasure* and that their *diminution* is experienced as *pain*. Let us consider the fact that simply *becoming conscious* of a power or ability to effect something is in itself a form of this power's augmentation, particularly because it puts us in the position of being able to make an efficient use of it. From this consideration it clearly follows that everything that makes us *acquainted* with our capacities is pleasant and agreeable; for example, when we become conscious of having *effected* something by them. The more noble and important a capacity is, the more pleasure we derive from its augmentation, even if we are not conscious of this increase; this is all the more true when we are conscious of it. We experience gratification whenever we exert our capacities in a way that is not too easy, but also not so difficult that our other capacities are diminished. In particular, rigorous, but not too rigorous meditation brings us pleasure, especially when all of our cognitive faculties are set in motion, and even more so when our success in drawing a correct inference shows us that we have not made a false judgement. Such meditation brings us even greater pleasure when it does not demand that we be distinctly conscious of every single thought involved; that is, when our thoughts proceed with such ease and swiftness that we are unable to say how we made the right inference, even though we have clearly done so. Given the fact that there are certain events that bring us pleasure and gratification, it is obvious that everything that serves as a *means* to their actualization, and even everything that serves as a *sign* of their approach, also brings us pleasure. Finally, we can derive pleasure from every form of ethical good brought about by ourselves or others and even from every object that facilitates the actualization of ethical aims, but only on the condition that the commandments of duty have become the rules guiding our actions, that we live with the conviction that every avoidance of our duty only does us harm



and brings us no good, and that we are conscious of the universal truth that the happiness of all increases correlatively with the sacredness of the world's ethical laws and principles.

X

But enough of these general remarks. Let us begin to apply them to our current task. We have taken it upon ourselves to uncover the *source* of our liking for and pleasure in the beautiful. A starting point for our inquiry is the fact that only *educated human beings* are able to experience this gratification, *animals* being wholly *incapable* of such gratification, *higher beings* transcending it. The first thing apparent to us is the fact that our liking for the beautiful does not originate in the *thought of the possible benefits* that the beautiful object might bring us or others, however important these benefits might be. Although it is true that the consideration of the possible benefits to be derived from an object may cause us to like that object, this cannot hold for the specific sort of pleasure that we experience when contemplating beautiful objects. This is proven by the impossibility of explaining how we came to doubt that higher beings can experience pleasure in the beautiful, because we normally think of higher beings – at least those with good intentions – as beings that like everything that is good and beneficent, if not for themselves, then at least for others. How, then, could they possibly view the beautiful with indifference if it is something beneficial to us? Would not their liking for the beautiful necessarily stand in direct correlation to the clarity and distinctness of their perception of its capacity to be truly beneficial to us? Such an understanding of the nature of the beautiful and the origins of the pleasure we experience in contemplating it is also refuted by our innermost feelings. If the representation of the object's utility for ourselves or for others were the cause of our liking for it, would we not have to be in a position to rigorously meditate on the nature of this utility, clearly articulating its purpose? But we are incapable of doing such a thing. There are thousands of objects that we find beautiful and observe with the greatest pleasure without being able to derive any utility from them (provided that we have meditated on the reasons that we like them). Everybody finds rainbows beautiful without being able to derive any use from them; everybody finds the sight of wildflowers more beautiful than that of wheat fields, even though the former are of no use to us, and the latter are of the greatest use; we view the uncaged tiger with fear whereas we contemplate the beauty of the caged tiger with the greatest pleasure. So, if the pleasure we experience in the beautiful object does not lie in the utility it has for us, what does it lie in? If it is not to be found in the features of the object revealed by our contemplation,



then it must be found in the *activity of contemplation itself*; that is, in the way the object occasions our cognitive faculties to *engage* with it. If neither creatures with lesser capacities nor spirits with greater capacities than ours are able to experience pleasure in the beautiful, then such pleasure must clearly be conditioned by the relation *our* cognitive faculties have to the object. Our pleasure derives from the fact that the object gives our faculties the occasion to contemplate it in a way that is neither too easy nor too difficult for them. Such commensurability with our faculties spurs their *growth*. We experience this growth of our faculties even when we are not distinctly conscious of this growth, simply feeling it with pleasure; and this feeling of pleasure is itself the liking that we experience when contemplating the beautiful. In an hour when we are not bothered by any pressing needs, our eye (mental or physical) is confronted with an object the very representation of which catches our attention and invites us to further contemplation. We find before us a number of features that cannot be readily deduced from one another. We immediately decide to form an exhaustive concept of this object (even if we do not consciously form this decision or do not explicitly state it to ourselves). This excites our imagination in the liveliest way, and at the same moment we imagine the features of objects similar to the contemplated object, but which the latter itself lacks. Using our power of judgement and our faculties of reason we choose features of the other objects that might also be shared by the object in question. In combining them with those qualities of the object that our perception has revealed to us we produce a concept of it. We put this concept's adequacy to the test by continuing to contemplate the object. The correctness of our concept is proven if it corresponds to the object itself, that is, if our continued observation reveals that the features we had presumed to be there from the outset are indeed actual features of the object, or if our observation at least reveals that the object's actual qualities can be deduced from our concept. At this moment, our cognitive faculties are *augmented*, because the correctness of their method has been confirmed. Thus, it is no wonder that we experience a singular gratification at the end of our contemplation. But if our pleasure in the beautiful is not distinguished by anything more than the fact that it is an activity that *trains* and *augments* our cognitive faculties, then it is ultimately of the same nature as the gratification we experience when our method of inquiry is proven correct by its end result, for instance, when we complete a *mathematical proof*. But in all actuality, there lies a great difference between these two forms of gratification. And although most people are receptive to the gratification afforded by the contemplation of the beautiful, few have mental powers that are developed enough to enable them to find

enjoyment in mathematical proofs and true speculation.¹² Why? Engaging in mathematical or speculative inquiries is entirely different from losing oneself in the contemplation of a beautiful object. With the former, we take care to develop all of our thoughts *as distinctly as possible*, clearly conscious of our movement from one concept, proposition, or inference to the next. With the latter, however,

¹² I purposely say *true* speculation, by which I mean speculation in which we strive to maintain a clear and distinct consciousness of the contents and foundations of every single one of the thoughts involved. This is certainly necessary in mathematical inquiries, but is even more so in those of philosophy if we are to avoid drawing illusory and false conclusions. In my opinion, there are two causes of error in that division of philosophy whose doctrines are based not on experience, but on reason alone: lack of clear and distinct concepts or (in rare cases even combined with) a passion that obscures judgement. Even if it seems clear to me that one does not usually do anything more to clarify his concepts than the love of truth demands, such that he not fall into error; and even if I am of the opinion that nobody has yet clearly conceptualized what *true clarity and distinctness is and what it demands*, I nevertheless claim that the philosophy of our time, and precisely that philosophy which claims to be the only justified philosophy, has neglected its duty to be clear and distinct in a heretofore unheard of degree, and has even refused to acknowledge this duty. How this has come to be, I do not know – whether it simply be caused by one's disgust with the tasteless and superfluous way *Wolff* and others used to believe they were fulfilling this duty, I do not wish to investigate. However, the fact that it is so is, I think, obvious. Can one at all deny that our modern philosophers use the words and expressions central to their systems in such ambiguous, unclear, indeterminate ways that confusion about their meaning could never be greater? To name some examples: the absolute, the identity of difference, certainty and truth, concept and object, representation and idea, judgement and syllogism, negation, sublation, relation, contradiction, possibility, actuality and necessity, finite and infinite, essence, substance, personality, freedom, eternity, and so forth. Can one deny that one blames the other for having misunderstood him, and that, at the same time, nobody bothers to *clarify* what he means by certain words, not to speak of listing the constituents of the concept that he wants to signify with them? But most decisive is the fact that the history of philosophy gives us an example of a man who lacked the gift of clear thought to such a degree that he – it can be proven – could not understand the simplest mathematical proofs although having, he admits, spent 25 years with them and, nevertheless, was able to attain such prominence in the field of philosophy that we now all know the name of *G. W. F. Hegel*! Would you not believe it to be a marvel more stupendous than any *Strauss* ever dealt with when you hear of men who can hardly get a grasp of their own thoughts and who nevertheless claim to be in possession of a philosophical system which is supposed to be 'the truth and the whole truth', even '*the truth fully transparent to itself*'? – No, I say, the abstractions of philosophy are infinitely more difficult than those of mathematics, and whoever is incapable of understanding the figures and symbolic constructions of mathematics, incapable of applying the general formula to the individual problem and keeping error at bay, that person should not even attempt to hold discussions in the field of philosophy. In this academic discipline one will get nowhere, or, to use Kant's expression, one will not be able to get on his feet unless one is absolutely resolved to precisely *define* the meaning of each of his expressions; and, moreover, one will not be able to get on his feet unless he does not shy away from demonstrating whether the concepts signified by these expressions are *simple* or *complex*, and, if the latter, does not shy from determining the concepts of which they are composed. This seemingly indifferent investigation leads to the most astonishing results and is capable of deciding disputes that would have otherwise lasted an eternity.

we are not at all concerned with becoming distinctly conscious of our thoughts. Rather, we hurry as quickly as possible from one thought to another until we have come across a concept that represents the object in such a way that it contains the sum of the qualities that our contemplation has revealed to us. Thus, in the former case, our ability to think *clearly and distinctly* is trained and augmented, whereas in the latter, our ability to think by means of *obscure representations* is trained and augmented. It is therefore completely understandable that the pleasure we experience in the first case is of a wholly different nature from the pleasure we experience in the second. It is no wonder that we experience pleasure when we are given the occasion to augment our ability to draw correct inferences by means of obscure representations, or even when we have an inkling that this ability is being augmented: because, although it is easier, it is of no less value and is actually more useful for everyday life. This, indeed, is the pleasure we experience when we contemplate a beautiful object, and attempt to develop a concept of its beauty. In essence, it is a pleasure in our *contemplation itself*. Without the *object*, however, we would have no occasion for this contemplation. We therefore necessarily *project* our liking onto the object, all the more so because we can only *feel* the augmentation of our cognitive capacity: we cannot be distinctly conscious of this augmentation, cannot *represent* it, and therefore cannot make a *judgement* about it. If this account of our pleasure in the beautiful is correct, then we can find an example of how man is capable of deriving correct conclusions from obscure premises in the correctness of our claim that the gratification afforded us by the beautiful is a gratification that cannot be shared by higher or lower beings, even though we cannot explain whence this liking arises in a distinct manner. But the foundations underlying these conclusions are now clear: animals are incapable of engaging in the sort of contemplation dealt with here, and higher spirits are incapable of augmenting and strengthening their powers by such contemplation, and therefore cannot experience the same pleasure as human beings do when engaging in it.

XI

By answering the second question posed in § VI, we have become acquainted with a second, very complex attribute of the beautiful: *the beautiful must be an object the contemplation of which causes pleasure in all people whose cognitive faculties are sufficiently developed. This pleasure occurs because, after apprehending some of the object's qualities, the formation of a concept of the object is neither too easy nor too difficult for the thinking person, as it doesn't necessitate the rigour of distinct thought. Moreover, it results from the fact that the concept thus formed, in making it possible for the person contemplating to guess at those qualities of*

the object only accessible to further contemplation, affords him with at least an obscure intuition of the proficiency of his own cognitive faculties. As the correct apprehension of this attribute is of central importance for our concept (that is, that the liking for the beautiful indeed arises in the way outlined here), it is not superfluous to add a few remarks. My readers would most readily convince themselves of the correctness of this definition if they were to engage in intense introspection while contemplating a beautiful object, thus becoming *distinctly conscious* of the fact that they do indeed experience thoughts like the ones described here. But as it is certainly easier to form a distinct idea of our mental processes after someone else has said something about them, I would like to give some examples of beautiful objects, outlining the thought processes involved in their observation and contemplation. If someone asks us if we find a fairly precisely drawn logarithmic spiral – the curve of which moves at a 45-degree angle – to be beautiful, we will certainly state, after a moment's contemplation, that we do indeed find it pleasing. What have we engaged with here, and what affords us this gratification? Like any other object that we contemplate with leisure, the drawing would occasion us to ask: what sort of object is this? Under what concept can it be subsumed? And we are certainly capable of giving an answer. We immediately perceived that the line before us has two characteristics: one of its segments progressively approaches a certain point (namely, the midpoint of the spiral), whereas the other progressively gets farther and farther away from this point. We realized that, in order to form a concept of this line, we have to understand the law that dictates that the line approaches the midpoint on the one hand and moves away from it on the other. Soon thereafter, we hit upon the idea that this law might indeed be that of *congruence*, that is, that an angle's distance from the midpoint increases at a constant rate, or, alternatively, that this distance increases according to a set ratio. Contemplating further, we find our conjecture confirmed: as far as the naked eye can see, the distance from the midpoint is doubled with every curve. We perceive this without having to undertake any sort of measurement, without having to have a distinct consciousness of this law in our mind, and without even having to articulate this thought in words. This pleases us and that is why we call the line beautiful. We read a literary work for the first time in our lives, say, the fable 'The Wolf and the Lamb'. After reading a few lines we already have an idea of who the wolf and the lamb are supposed to represent, and we can guess how the story is going to turn out. Reading further, we find our conjectures confirmed. Similarly, we find that the new conjectures we developed while reading about the wolf's constant accusations are also confirmed. When we consider the entire story after having read it, we find that every single word served to further the author's

purpose – namely, to express the *lesson* that we had anticipated the whole time and that was fully articulated at the end of the story. The fact that we are capable of anticipating the lesson while reading the story and understanding the lesson at the story's conclusion is essential for our enjoyment of the work. But the fact that we are able to do so with ease and with such speed that we have no need of being distinctly conscious of all the individual thoughts involved delights us by demonstrating the proficiency of our cognitive capacities. For this reason, we call the story beautiful. Finally, we are given a *riddle*. After pondering it for some time, we should be able to find its solution. Solving the riddle should not be so easy that anyone can do it, nor should it be so difficult that it can only be done by chance. Rather, we should be able to find the solution by eliminating possible choices by ratiocination. But we should also be able to do this all in a matter of seconds, without wrapping ourselves up in strenuous thought; we should be able to do it without being distinctly conscious of all the inferences we have to make in order to eliminate the wrong choices. And after we have found the solution, it should at once become clear to us why the riddle's author formulated it in the way he did and not in any other. We will experience a liking for this riddle because it will have demonstrated our ability to make a well thought out guess and because our power of judgement will have profited from the exercise. We will therefore call it a *beautiful* riddle.

XII

I believe that I can substantiate the claim I made in § X regarding the origins of our liking for the beautiful with a few more arguments. Admittedly, I will not make these arguments with clearcut conclusions; but I will nevertheless support my arguments with reasoning that cannot be contested in the same way that the appeals to individual feelings in the previous section might be. My *first* argument is that our pleasure in the beautiful cannot be grounded in anything other than the reasons I have given, because there are countless cases *where there is no other conceivable explanation of the origins of such gratification*. To convince ourselves of this fact, we need only take into account the examples given in the previous section. If the undeniable gratification we experience when contemplating a spiral or some other geometrical figure does not have its origin in the sources I have elucidated, then I challenge anyone to give a more sufficient explanation. This gratification cannot have its origins in the thought of the possible utility that such geometrical figures might have or in their similarity with some valuable object. In the end, there is really no other feasible explanation than the one given. Will our critic have more success in explaining the liking we experience for the fable 'The Wolf and the Lamb'? Is not the beauty of the fable

diminished the moment we admit that one of its parts seems to us to lack purpose? Finally, it is clear that solving the riddle gives us occasion to demonstrate to ourselves the proficiency of our own faculties of thinking and ratiocination and that this is why we find the riddle beautiful.

XIII

The *second* argument I bring in to support the correctness of my definition is the following: *the degree of gratification we experience when contemplating a beautiful object intensifies in correlation with the proficiency that we demonstrate in our apprehension of it or with the way the object trains and makes demands of our cognitive faculties.* So, for example, even a simple chord (say a note and its octave) played over long duration can please us. This is because even being able to hear the chord correctly (namely, as a chord made up of a note and its octave) and identify it demands training. Our liking is undeniably greater when we hear more complex chords, such as triads, and it increases when we are capable of naming the notes of the chord. Why? Clearly because distinguishing the notes of a triad demands more training and skill. To give another example which will make this point even more clear: we no doubt experience more pleasure when looking at the outline of a beautiful palace or temple than we do when simply looking at one of its parts, a gate, for instance. Similarly, nobody will question the fact that a riddle appears all the more beautiful the more we are able to demonstrate our wit in solving it. Our views on the pleasure derived from contemplating the beautiful are thus certainly not wrong, because they are able to account for its varying degrees and types.

XIV

Having set aside all doubt concerning the attribute of the beautiful explicated in § XI, we are now in the position of being able to see whether we can develop a concept that, if not identical with the concept of the beautiful, is at least of the same extension. In order to do this, we will combine the latter attribute with those explicated in the earlier sections. We need not worry about the extension of the concept being too *narrow*, because the fact that each one of the attributes explicated up to now (in §§ III, V, VI, VII, X) is *general* means that even if we bring *all* of these attributes together we will still end up with a concept applicable to every beautiful object. Conversely, however, such a concept could run the danger of being redundant. If the features implied by one of the constituents are already implied by one or more of the other constituents, then the former could be left out without expanding the concept's extension. This would certainly occur if we were to add any of the attributes we explicated earlier to the one explicated

in § XI, because the latter contains all of the former, either directly as constituents or indirectly by inference. Let us recall our definition of *the beautiful object as an object the contemplation of which causes pleasure in all people whose cognitive faculties are sufficiently developed. This pleasure occurs because, after apprehending some of the object's qualities, the formation of a concept of the object is neither too easy nor too difficult for the person contemplating, since it doesn't necessitate the rigour of distinct thought. Moreover, it results from the fact that the concept thus formed, in making it possible for the person contemplating to guess at those qualities of the object only accessible to further contemplation, affords him with at least an obscure intuition of the proficiency of his own cognitive faculties.* This definition contains the *first* attribute, developed in § III – namely, that the beautiful object is one that *is capable of pleasing us by its mere contemplation.* Further, this definition contains the *second* attribute, developed in § V – namely, that the contemplation by which the beautiful object is able to bring us pleasure must proceed *with such ease and swiftness that we need not be distinctly conscious of all the thoughts involved.* Finally, although this definition does not explicitly contain what we required in our *third* attribute, developed in § VI, that the beautiful *may not simply be grounded in the particular relation the object has to us as individuals,* this qualification is implied by it. Because the beautiful cannot have its source in the object's exclusive relation to us as individuals if every educated person must be in a position of being able to form a concept of it in the way explained in § V, and thus if every educated person must be able to derive the same gratification from it. Not only that, but all the other aspects of the beautiful developed in § VI can be found in this definition: the claim of *universal validity;* the requirement that every other equally educated person have a liking for objects that we judge to be beautiful; the fact that one denies that *animals* or uneducated *children* could have a sense of the beautiful; and, finally, the idea that spirits of a higher kind than ourselves certainly have *knowledge* of the beautiful, but experience no *enjoyment* in its contemplation. Similarly, every aspect of our meditation on the *content* of the contemplation of the beautiful (§ VII) is either explicitly contained in this definition or is implied in such a way as to make any dispute about it superfluous.

The attribute of the beautiful explicated [in § XI] thus makes all the others superfluous. But do we have to hold on to everything contained in this one attribute? Can we not omit some aspects of it without expanding the concept's extension? It thus seems that we can do without the idea that the contemplation of the beautiful must bring about our *pleasure* and we can do without the idea that this pleasure must have its roots in the way this contemplation makes it *possible for us to have at least an obscure intuition of the proficiency of our own*

cognitive faculties, because both of these ideas can be readily deduced from the characteristics of the contemplation outlined in the given definition. Let us recall that our definition states that the beautiful object is such that forming a concept of it must be neither too easy nor too difficult for the educated person. It must thus be possible for him to guess at those qualities of the object that are not readily apparent to his perception and can only be revealed by further contemplation. Does it not follow from this that the object makes it possible for him to at least have an obscure intuition of the proficiency of his own cognitive faculties? And, further, does it not follow from the latter that the contemplation of such an object must give pleasure to him? This is true in most cases, but not all. For example, if we see somebody with an expression of despair running up and down the shore of a raging river and then stopping at the deepest point, we feel anxiety because we think that this person is contemplating suicide. When, indeed, he throws himself into the river, do we call this sight *beautiful*? Even though our correct anticipation has actually proven the proficiency of our cognitive faculties, the event is so awful that no educated person would, at this moment, venture to rejoice in the proficiency of their cognitive faculties and experience pleasure therein. We therefore do not have an obscure intuition of, nor derive pleasure from, the proficiency of our cognitive faculties every time they are exercised in a way that is neither too easy nor too difficult. And only when the object of our contemplation is capable of giving us such pleasure do we claim that it is truly beautiful.

XV

Thus, every aspect of the definition of the beautiful recapitulated at the beginning of the previous section is essential; none of them can be omitted without altering the concept itself. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves whether something must still be added to this definition in order for it to adequately describe the concept designated by the word 'beautiful' (or at least a concept wholly equivalent to it). Is not our definition of the concept of the *beautiful* still too broad? If this is the case, then we must ensure that our definition has the proper extension by *limiting* it in some way. But how should we go about doing this? Should we limit the *type* of object capable of occasioning the sort of contemplation outlined in our definition? Maybe we could claim that it is only one *particular sort of object*, those that can be apprehended by our *senses* perhaps? But our everyday language also allows us – even demands us – to call some *supersensory* objects beautiful: do we not often speak of a *beautiful soul*? *Virtue*, something that certainly is not tangible to our senses, has been called beautiful since ancient times. The same goes for *holy spirits* and even *godliness* itself. Or should we give a more precise

determination of the *type of gratification or pleasure* occasioned by the beautiful object, or maybe of its *origins*? But how should we limit this part of our definition? It already excludes so many things, either in itself or by inferences that can easily be drawn from it: it excludes everything that is merely *agreeable to our senses*, and, with that, everything that only gratifies us by virtue of its particular relation to *us as individuals*, and, finally, everything that gratifies us simply by virtue of its *usefulness*. Similarly, our definition makes clear that the beautiful only provides us with *mental* gratification. Finally, it makes clear that our contemplation of the beautiful object must neither be too easy nor too difficult, such that we need not be distinctly conscious of every single thought involved in it. How could we possibly limit our concept any further? Nobody could seriously demand that we limit the *number* of the beautiful object's discrete features in advance. Nor could anybody seriously ask us to determine the *intensity of the gratification* occasioned by the contemplation of a beautiful object. As our definition leaves it undetermined, we might be led to presume that there are different *degrees of beauty*. Or should we further *qualify* the being capable of enjoying the beautiful? We claimed that this being must be *a human being whose cognitive faculties are sufficiently developed*, from which it follows that the being's liking for the object is not merely a product of his personal flaws or inabilities. I do not think that one can really develop this part of our definition any further. But even if our definition expands the meaning of the beautiful, this would certainly not be a bad thing if our concept had some significance of its own, which, it is hoped, will not be denied. Is it not certain that the type of object we have defined deserves its own *name* either way? Namely, that type of object that pleases every person whose cognitive faculties are sufficiently developed, increasing his awareness of the proficiency of his capacity to think by means of obscure representations. Should we not use such objects to relax after a long day's work? Or to increase our enjoyment of life? More importantly, should we not give young people plenty of opportunity to interact with such objects? In developing a taste for such objects, young people would not only develop their cognitive faculties, but would also be able to help their own communities grasp the most important truths and convictions. And if we did not already have a name for objects of this sort, which word could possibly be more appropriate than the word 'beautiful'? I think that the definition given in § XIV really captures the way this word is used and that it is at least a concept *equivalent* to the one aestheticians have for centuries denoted by the word 'beautiful', if not this concept itself. Why do I not say, however, that it is the *same* concept? How contentious that would be! Because who is in a position to say what other people have since their earliest years signified with the word 'beautiful'? And who is to say what comes to people's minds when they use



the word? Indeed, they might still view these associations as essential parts of the concept's meaning. But that the constituents of the concept given in my definition are not wholly foreign to the concept in question, and that they are really contained in most people's understanding of the beautiful, is proven by the fact that so many perceptive thinkers have come across the very same constituents in their own attempts to define the beautiful, as I will show in the next section.

XVI

Much of what can be *inferred* from our definition of the beautiful finds its exact counterpart in the works of other aestheticians. I take this to be further confirmation of its correctness. I will thus allow myself to list only the most important conclusions here.

1. Our definition is able to account for the fact that we often have a difficult time explaining why we find a certain object beautiful or not, a problem all aestheticians attempt to account for. One used to think – and some people still do think – that our judgements of taste are made *immediately*, without reference to any concepts or rules or that they follow from premises that are *inexpressible*. The reason for this is quite natural, however. It results from the fact that the thoughts accompanying our enjoyment of the beautiful are carried out with such ease and swiftness that we hardly become distinctly conscious of them. We usually deem thoughts and judgements of which we have no distinct consciousness to be *inexpressible*, and sometimes we are even inclined to deny that they exist in our minds at all.

2. Our definition makes it conceivable why only *two* of our senses are capable of bringing us representations of the beautiful – namely, the *higher* senses of *sight* and *hearing* – a fact taught by all aestheticians. The representations given by the *lower* senses of *taste* and *smell* are too simple for a rule to be observed in their composition or succession, the discovery of which would allow us to contemplate them in a way that would be gratifying for our cognitive capacities. What sort of pleasure could we derive from contemplating the laws underlying a good meal, or the fact that sweet and savoury are combined in a certain way? Certain objects perceived by our sense of touch, certain plastic objects, can in some cases, such as when a trained eye looks over them, reveal to us relations varied and yet rule-guided enough to give us pleasure. But this would almost certainly proceed too slowly for us to be able to derive the singular sort of gratification afforded us by the contemplation of the beautiful.

3. Our definition makes it perfectly conceivable why an object that is supposed to afford us the pleasure of the beautiful must be wholly new to us or must at



least have some features that are new to us. Because only then does the contemplation of the object make us exert our cognitive faculties in the necessary way. Complex objects with many distinct parts like paintings or long poems can only be exhaustively comprehended by rigorous contemplation. Thus, the gratification they afford us grows over time, whereas things whose beauty is of a simpler nature soon lose their interest for us.

4. Our definition also makes it clear why different levels of education demand different objects if the person contemplating the object is to enjoy it and not simply admit that it is beautiful. Children and savages are satisfied with the simplest forms of beauty; they are unable to grasp more complex forms. People with developed tastes, on the other hand, do not deny that such simple objects certainly are beautiful, even if this beauty is of a lesser sort. But they do not derive any pleasure from such objects. Such people only derive enjoyment from *higher* forms of beauty, from more complex objects, those the organizational principles of which are not so easily understood.

XVII

I am not entirely certain whether the following will be counted among those things that confirm the correctness of my definition of the beautiful, because I am not sure whether it will be admitted that this inference has already been drawn by others. It follows from my definition that only some select objects are capable of occasioning a *pure* liking for the beautiful free from all other feelings. That is because, following from my definition, practically only *pictures* (spatial relations) and *tone sequences of varying duration* (temporal relations) are capable of causing such a liking. The gratification we experience when contemplating other types of beautiful objects is usually augmented by some other sort of agreeableness. Along with their beauty, they are *agreeable* to our senses in some other way; or they gratify us by opening the prospect of some other form of *enjoyment*; or we derive pleasure from contemplating their integral *purposiveness*, their high degree of *utility* for us or for others; or from contemplating their inner value, their *ethical goodness and excellence*, all of which bring us pleasure of a wholly different sort from the pleasure that is derived from contemplating them and forming an exhaustive concept of them. However much these merits might increase our liking of such objects, we cannot allow them to tip the scale of our judgements regarding the *degree of beauty* of such objects. Because the only thing of relevance when considering the *true beauty* of an object is the degree to which its contemplation can gratify us without requiring the effort of distinct thought. The ways they might please us beyond this are not the object of this essay. To give a few examples: when judging the beauty of a piece of music,

the gratification caused by the feelings and moods associated with the tone of the *instruments* or the tone of the *human voice* should not come into consideration (though they tend to affect us in an almost magical way). Rather, it is only the *purposeful arrangement and selection* of these instruments that is essential to the music's beauty, because it is the aspect that a trained, knowledgeable listener can at least roughly [*dunke!*] discern. Thus, every song performed by a voice that is agreeable to us – for instance, by a soothing voice – has a *mixed beauty*. This is also true of every *poem* that makes us *enthusiastic* about something, that fills our breast with great emotion and determination, feelings we experience with pleasure. In particular the beauty of the *human form* is a very *mixed* kind of beauty. In addition to those things that the definition of the beautiful developed here compels us to find beautiful, there is a whole plethora of pleasurable representations caused by the sight of a beautiful person which *can* and sometimes *should* be pleasurable to us. Does it not belong to the essential characteristics of the human body that we see not only that person's physical but also spiritual health, that we see in that person's face both understanding and judgement, goodness and kindness? Can we refrain from experiencing a feeling of pleasure at the sight of such perfections?

XVIII

We usually maintain that the *ugly* is the opposite of the beautiful, although it might be more precise, though a little less conventional, to say the *foul*. So, if our definition of the beautiful is correct, then we must be in a position to define the concept of the *ugly* in a way that makes it clear why it is the opposite of the beautiful. Indeed, this should pose no problem for us. Let us first recall our definition of the beautiful as an object the contemplation of which causes pleasure in all people whose cognitive faculties are sufficiently developed, a pleasure that occurs because, after apprehending some of the object's qualities, the formation of a concept of the object is neither too easy nor too difficult for the person contemplating, since it doesn't necessitate the rigour of distinct thought; finally, a pleasure that results from the fact that the concept thus formed, in making it possible for the person contemplating to guess at those qualities of the object only accessible to further contemplation, affords him with at least an obscure intuition of the proficiency of his own cognitive faculties. By contrast, the *ugly is an object that vexes us, at least when we do not make the effort to maintain the rigour of clear and distinct thought: it vexes us because every time we apprehend the object's qualities and attempt to develop a concept of it we always find something that contradicts the concept that we have formed of it*. A few examples will serve to convince us that this definition is not false. In a poem that

otherwise follows a specific rhyme scheme, we find it ugly when a rhyme is suddenly missing or out of place. Why? For the simple reason that the presence of a rhyme scheme throughout the poem has led us to expect that this rhyme scheme will be maintained in the rest of the poem: we are vexed the moment this legitimate expectation is dashed. Similarly, when the structure and parts of a building lead us to believe that it is constructed according to principles of symmetry, we are vexed when we come upon a part that deviates from this principle. Our vexation is not diminished if somebody then attempts to demonstrate to us by precise measurements that this deviation is only apparent, that it is indeed balanced out by other parts of the building which are hardly perceptible to us: the notion that such measurements should be at all necessary itself contradicts what it means to be beautiful. This not only shows that the ugly in and of itself is capable of vexing us and is thus the opposite of the beautiful. From this it also follows that there is a *mixed ugliness* in cases where the object is also disagreeable to our senses, just as there is a *mixed beauty* in cases where the object is also agreeable to our senses. This also makes it clear why we can perceive *ugly things* within a *beautiful whole* with pleasure, as when an ugly person appears at the right place and the right time in a comedy. If they are integrated into the beautiful whole in such a way that it corresponds to a formal rule that we have deduced from the comedy's structure, these otherwise ugly beings may be considered *beautiful in their relation to the whole*.

XIX

In order to avoid giving the impression that I am keeping anything from the reader which might be of relevance in making a judgement about the correctness of my definition of the beautiful, I would like to consider *some objections that might be made against it*. I will list what I consider the most important objections and will attempt to counter them. But I will not consider the case closed until I have expounded on some of the most noteworthy definitions others have given and after I have explained why I have been unable to remain satisfied with any of them.

1. First and foremost, one might object that there are objects wholly lacking in complexity and a multitude of distinct parts, which we nevertheless can find beautiful, such as simple colours or tones. This would then show that my description of the origins of the pleasure derived from the beautiful is incorrect. Or are there cases where, when contemplating a simple colour and attempting to answer the question what colour it is, our cognitive powers are activated in such a way as to give us an intuition of their proficiency? It must be remembered

that it has yet to be decided whether objects of such simplicity may be called *beautiful* in the true sense of the word or are simply *agreeable to our senses*. The answer ultimately depends on a few things: it depends on whether our contemplation of single tones and colours consists in anything more than merely *perceiving* them with our senses (which animals are capable of doing too); whether contemplating these simple objects demands the sort of proficiency of mind developed by training and practice; and whether we exert, if not all, than at least most of our cognitive faculties when contemplating them. Whoever thinks that each of these should be answered in the negative will certainly also deny that colours and tones have a beauty of their own; and in so doing, he will prove that he makes this judgement in a way wholly in line with my definition of the beautiful. But with time I have come to believe that all of those things are indeed true. A colour evenly spread over a surface, a pure tone sounded in a steady diminuendo: these too are complex objects with a multitude of distinct parts that must be taken up in contemplation. If we are to experience a *liking* for the pure tone and its duration, then we must know that the duration of the vibrations caused in our ears by the displacement of the ether or air has a certain magnitude, or, further, that the duration of the *alterations* caused in our *mind itself* by these nervous vibrations has itself a certain magnitude. Experience teaches us that making such precise observations is not an easy task and requires some training. Furthermore, whoever has a mind keen enough to make such observations will find it necessary to contemplate the beauty of such tones and colours over a longer period of time; that is, he will be compelled to *lose himself* in them. Finally, it is clear that such observation requires not only the exertion of our capacities of perception, but also the exertion of our memory, imagination, and power of judgement. For all these reasons, it is clear that the liking we experience when contemplating such objects is a liking for the *beautiful* in the precise sense defined here. It is certainly true that we can refine our *sense of taste* by practice, which is shown by the example of the gourmet who is capable of telling us the ingredients in a dish just by tasting it, often with more precision than a chemical analysis. But now somebody might want to infer from what I've said here that such gourmets experience the pleasures of their refined taste as *beautiful* pleasures. In my definition of the beautiful object, however, I claim that the gratification afforded to us by contemplating the object is not derived from those features readily apparent to our perception. Rather, I claim that our gratification is derived from correctly *guessing* the presence of certain aspects of the object wholly *independent* of those features that can be inferred from those we can perceive, but are nevertheless related to them in a way essential to the composition of

the object as a whole. Do we encounter anything of the kind when the gourmet tells us the vintage and the origin of the wine he is drinking? Or when he lists off all the spices and other ingredients in the dish he just ate? He does not make a *guess* as to the other ingredients a dish might contain on the basis of the flavours he has already tasted. Rather, he infers the presence of other ingredients that have a *necessary* connection with those he has already tasted in the dish. But things are completely different when we listen to a tone, even if only a single one. As soon as the tone's first vibrations reach our ear, we listen for how *high* the note is; that is, we attempt to discern the relation between the duration of the vibrations and some length of time that we are familiar with and that we consider to be unalterable (namely, that of a particular mental activity, such as counting). If we devote ourselves to such exertion to a sufficient degree, and if the tone is indeed a *pure* tone, then the attempt cannot fail. Nevertheless, we will not be distinctly conscious of what note it is; rather, it will simply come to us. After having identified the tone, we will then see whether the next tone in the sequence is identical to it. If it turns out to be so, thus confirming that our initial guess was correct, then every essential aspect of the gratification afforded by the beautiful is given. Nevertheless, I admit that the pleasure afforded to us by a *single* tone or a *single* colour is a *very small* pleasure and that such objects must have a *low* degree of beauty. Only when we are given a sequence of multiple tones or colours ordered in a specific way whose law is not all too easily (but also not too difficultly) guessed at will we experience a higher gratification. And the whole sequence will undoubtedly deserve to be called *beautiful*.

XX

2. On the one hand, there are objects that can be apprehended *all too easily* for them to deserve to be called *beautiful*. On the other hand, it will be said, there are objects the apprehension of which demand *far too much exertion* on our part for them to be called *beautiful* according to my definition. But imagine how much study is demanded to properly interpret the meaning of a poem written in an ancient language, a poem which we call beautiful even though the attempt to apprehend it has made us exert our minds to the fullest, maybe even more than attempting to apprehend the most difficult of Euclid's theorems might have! I reply: when we call a poem – or any other object for that matter – beautiful, we do not claim that *every* mode of contemplating it gratifies us, but only *certain* ones. We do not wish to deny the fact that we often have to arduously examine an object before its contemplation affords us any pleasure. Such arduous examination might entail that we make clear formulations about the object

and its contents. However, it is sufficient that our final contemplation of it is such that it can proceed by means of obscure ideas and that the content of this contemplation is the same as that explicated in my definition. By contrast, even if we repeat a mathematical demonstration such that we have no need to form a distinct consciousness of its individual parts to ourselves when executing it, we still have no right to speak of beauty, because we do not make any *guesses*, but merely *inferences*. The mathematical demonstration is not an object whose manifold features lead us to attempt to formulate a concept of it. Rather, we draw conclusions from it that follow with absolute necessity.

XXI

3. Another objection might be that my definition equates the beautiful with the *regular*, and that there are many things that have a certain regularity which are nevertheless by no means beautiful. An example might be a well-made clock. On the other hand, not everything beautiful must have regularity, as we know one speaks of *irregular beauty*. According to my definition, however, not every instance of regularity or orderliness constitutes beauty, but only that regularity which can be divined without the effort of clear and distinct thought. I only think that the regularity of an object may be called beautiful when the contemplation of it contributes to the growth of our cognitive powers. Thus, my definition encompasses both: there are things with regularity that nobody finds beautiful, such as the functioning of a machine, which can only be understood after arduous analysis; and there are also beautiful things which lack a *certain* regularity. Even an irregularity – namely, a deviation from a rule that the genus of the object permits us to expect from it – must not necessarily detract from the beauty of an object or destroy its otherwise regular form. Such is the case when we speak of *irregular beauty*. In addition, the irregular part of such an object may indeed follow a lawfulness of another sort; thus, it might itself be seen as being beautiful. Blushing, stuttering and awkwardness are doubtless irregular behaviours. But in the right circumstances they can have a charming beauty, for instance, when a young woman blushes after her lover has expressed his feelings for her for the first time.

XXII

4. But one could further object that regularity is not only *not an essential attribute* of the beautiful, but it also detracts from beauty itself. A work of art that we find beautiful must appear to be the product of *free activity*. And a work in which we see the *force of the rules* according to which it was produced is disliked by us for precisely this reason.

To this I answer that the question of how an object was *produced* is not the question we take up when we want to judge whether that object is beautiful. We do not ask whether producing the work cost the artist great exertion, or whether he followed artistic *rules* in the strictest fashion: if the work lacks none of the features it should have as a work of art, then the way it was produced cannot in any way detract from its beauty. When we look at a beautiful statue, we might think of the fact that sculpting it required much work from the artist, that he had to chisel away at the stone again and again, assisted only by his compass and straightedge. But none of this lessens our praise of the statue's beauty. One can say that 'one should not be able to see the artist's labour in the work'. But if we are to avoid speaking nonsense, what should we understand by this expression? To *see* the artist's labour in the work can only mean that our observation leads us to surmise from one of its features that its production cost the artist great exertion. But nobody would be so irrational as to criticize the work if it is a *quality beyond reproach* that leads us to suppose that it required great exertion by the artist, say, if we think that such a high degree of perfection could only have been obtained by arduous labour. The idea that one should not be able to see the artist's labour in the final product can thus only mean one thing – namely, that the work should evidence no *imperfections* which, along with indicating that the artist deviated from a rule, made a mistake, or overlooked something, also indicate that the work's production required his great exertion. Understood in this sense, my definition of the beautiful raises no objection to the idea that one should not be able to see the artist's labour in the final product. So, according to my definition of the beautiful, what are we to say when it is readily apparent to us that an artist has insufficiently developed some formal aspect of his work or has deviated from some rule that he himself set, or has even, in consistently developing the formal properties of his work, violated some rule that we hold to be more important than those he adhered to? These shortcomings are, quite precisely, instances of the *ugly* (see § XVIII). A common example might be a poem the verse and rhyme scheme of which are sacrificed for the sake of the ideas and sentiments the poet is trying to transmit. Some recent philosophers go even further in claiming that everything beautiful is essentially 'irrational'. In Weisse's *System of Aesthetics* it is explicitly stated: 'a truly speculative science of aesthetics can have no greater task than to destroy at its root the *prejudice* that the key to the concept of beauty is to be found in *rational* proportions.'¹³ However, in reading the author's 'addendum', in which he seeks to 'fulfil [this task] to his very best', I have found nothing that even resembles a proof

¹³ [Christian Hermann Weisse, *System der Ästhetik* (Leipzig: Hartmann, 1830), §19.]

of his claim. Thus, I believe it is reasonable to hold on to this 'prejudice', especially because it is verified by many examples: for instance, by the fact that melody and harmony in music are dependent upon very *rational*, even *simple proportions* between tones and the duration of tones; or by the fact that the dimensions of spatial objects that we find beautiful also conform to certain rational proportions, even the human body itself, all things that Weisse himself acknowledges. One can only go so far as to say that imperceptibly minute deviations from these rational proportions do not detract from the beauty of the object; for instance, when one foot is slightly shorter than the other. One would not think of treating this as proof of the thesis that such proportions *must necessarily* be irrational. At the most, one can claim that a truly irrational proportion does not detract from the beauty of an object, so long as it is so close to being a rational proportion we do not perceive it as irrational. In the end, determining whether something is beautiful is not a matter of how the object is in and of itself, but rather only of how it appears to us.

XXIII

5. Some might object that my definition of the beautiful implies that an object always increases in beauty the easier and faster the whole of its features can be guessed from those readily perceivable, so, for example, that a drama whose plot and conclusion we can guess from the very beginning deserves more praise than a more difficult work. This, of course, is not the case. One demands that a play hold us in suspense and keep us guessing until the very last scene. Similarly, *surprises*, plot developments that we could never have foreseen, bring us pleasure, despite the fact that, or even more precisely because, we do not expect them.

The idea that an object's beauty increases the easier and more definitively we are able to guess its extant features from a few of those perceptible to us is impossible to derive from my definition. Rather, my definition implies that an object's features can be guessed with *too much ease and too definitively*, that is, when the contemplation of the object fails to augment our cognitive faculties in any way. There is no way a play or a story could keep our attention if we knew all the details of its plot from the very beginning. This is why it is one of the rules of dramas or epic narratives that the work, to a certain extent, keeps us in the dark about the events to come. This, indeed, contributes to the work's beauty. Thus, we find well-placed *surprises* beautiful, especially when the type of plot has led us to suspect that such surprises might come, even though we could never have guessed the particular nature of the surprise itself.

XXIV

6. The ugly is, as I have remarked, the opposite of the beautiful. If my definition of the latter is correct, then my definition of the ugly (§ XVIII), which is based on this opposition, must also be correct. But, one might object, my definition of the ugly is clearly insufficient. We call so many things ugly to which this definition does not apply at all! There are things that offend us in ways quite different from our incapacity to guess their features based on observations of those we perceive. We call *ugly* everything that disgusts us or causes us some other disagreeable sensation, even if only by its association with some disagreeable thing or event; for instance, a corpse or a gun that killed a beloved person.

All of this is true. Nevertheless, none of this is really an objection against my definition of the ugly or my definition of the beautiful. Rather, it merely demonstrates that we often use the word 'ugly' in a sense in which it is not the exact opposite of the beautiful. We often use it in a sense in which it merely denotes the opposite of the *agreeable* in general. In other cases, we often associate the word 'ugly' [*hässlich*] with the word it is derived from, namely 'hate' [*Hass*], whereby we think of something that is or could be an object of our hatred. In this sense, we might also call things ugly which are nothing less than the opposite of the beautiful, and which, despite their ugliness, have many beautiful parts.

XXV

7. Finally, one might say that the concept of the beautiful is so universal among human beings that it could not possibly be composed of so many parts woven together in a way as artificial as my definition presents it. All peoples, even the most primitive, have a notion of the beautiful and all distinguish between the beautiful and the foul. And however much various judgements concerning the beauty of this or that object may differ from one another, a certain common concept of the beautiful underlies them all. So long as they encounter many beautiful objects and many ugly objects, even children learn, at a very young age, to distinguish beautiful objects from ugly ones, experiencing joy at the sight of the former. And this means nothing less than that they are aware of the concept of the beautiful. So, it is clear that this concept must either be simple or, if complex, it must be composed out of a small number of parts related to one another out of a certain inner necessity.

I do not deny that the concept of the beautiful is widespread. But this fact does not justify the claim that the concept must be composed of very few parts or that it must be a simple concept. Indeed, there are many concepts which are

widely used – maybe even more so than the concept of the beautiful – and are, nevertheless, extremely complex. Who would dispute the complexity of the thousands of concepts we use to subsume *natural objects* under genera and species? I mean the concepts: horse, dog, cat, bird, fish, tree, bush, flower, fruit, apple, and so on. Do not even the simplest of these concepts have more parts than the concept of the beautiful as defined above? And yet how common they are! How quickly every child learns to use them! But there is really no great mystery in all of this. The moment multiple objects with similar qualities catch our attention, we attempt to develop a concept that applies to these objects and no other, composing the concept out of the representations we have of those common qualities. We do this in steps, taking constitutive parts into our concept when we perceive that they are common to this type of object, removing them from our concept when we find that they are not universally shared by such objects. And we do all this without being distinctly conscious of doing it – that is, we don't say to ourselves that we are doing it, and in many cases, would be incapable of articulating how we developed such a concept. If we want to explain why every person (at least so long as he has elevated himself above animal primitiveness) has some understanding of the concept of the beautiful, then it suffices to recall the fact that it is an *essential part of our nature as human beings* that, so long as our immediate needs are met, the activity of our restless minds drives us to find an adequate concept for every object we encounter. If we succeed in this with ease we are even capable of guessing the object's remaining qualities after perceiving only some of them, although the latter may not directly follow from the former, and we are capable of doing all this without having to formulate a clear and distinct idea of every single quality: it is thus understandable that this causes us a certain gratification. Thus, it seems very natural that we develop a concept of the beautiful after having encountered many such objects, and, likewise, that we develop a concept of the ugly after having encountered many objects where we failed at such guessing, however much we may have tried. Thus, the origins of these concepts are to be found in human nature itself. It is thus no wonder that all human beings use them with varying degrees of distinctness.

Translated by Adam Bresnahan

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