

THE RELEVANCE
OF THE
BEAUTIFUL AND
OTHER ESSAYS

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The relevance of the beautiful

Art as play, symbol, and festival

I think it is most significant that the question of how art can be justified is not simply a modern problem, but one that has been with us from the very earliest times. My first efforts as a scholar were dedicated to this question when in 1934 I published an essay entitled "Plato and the Poets."¹ In fact, as far as we know, it was in the context of the new philosophical outlook and the new claim to knowledge raised by Socratic thought that art was required to justify itself for the first time in the history of the West. Here, for the first time, it ceased to be self-evident that the diffuse reception and interpretation of traditional subject matter handed down in pictorial or narrative form did possess the right to truth that it had claimed. Indeed, this ancient and serious problem always arises when a new claim to truth sets itself up against the tradition that continues to express itself through poetic invention or in the language of art. We have only to consider the culture of late antiquity and its often lamented hostility to pictorial representation. At a time when walls were covered with incrustation, mosaics, and decoration, the artists of the age bemoaned the passing of *their* time. A similar situation arose with the restriction and final extinction of freedom of speech and poetic expression imposed by the Roman Empire over the world of late antiquity, and which Tacitus lamented in his famous dialogue on the decline of rhetoric, the *Dialogue on Oratory*. But above all, and here we approach our own time more closely than we might at first realize, we should consider the position that Christianity adopted toward the artistic tradition in which it found itself. The rejection of iconoclasm, a movement that had arisen in the Christian Church during the sixth and seventh centuries, was a decision of incalculable significance. For the Church then gave a new meaning to the visual language of art and later to the forms of poetry

and narrative. This provided art with a new form of legitimation. The decision was justified because only the new content of the Christian message was able to legitimate once again the traditional language of art. One of the crucial factors in the justification of art in the West was the *Biblia Pauperum*, a pictorial narration of the Bible designed for the poor, who could not read or knew no Latin and who consequently were unable to receive the Christian message with complete understanding.

The great history of Western art is the consequence of this decision which still largely determines our own cultural consciousness. A common language for the common content of our self-understanding has been developed through the Christian art of the Middle Ages and the humanistic revival of Greek and Roman art and literature, right up until the close of the eighteenth century and the great social transformations and political and religious changes with which the nineteenth century began.

In Austria and Southern Germany, for example, it is hardly necessary to describe the synthesis of classical and Christian subjects that overwhelms us with such vitality in the great surging waves of Baroque art. Certainly this age of Christian art and the whole Christian-classical, Christian-humanist tradition did not go unchallenged and underwent major changes, not least under the influence of the Reformation. It in turn brought a new kind of art into prominence, a kind of music based on the participation of the congregation, as in the work of Heinrich Schutz and Johann Sebastian Bach, for example. This new style revitalized the language of music through the text, thereby continuing in a quite new way the great unbroken tradition of Christian music that had begun with the chorale, which was itself the unity of Latin hymns and Gregorian melody bequeathed by Pope Gregory the Great.

It is against this background that the question of the justification of art first acquires a specific direction. We can seek help here from those who have already considered this question. This is not to deny that the new artistic situation experienced in our own century really does signify a break in a tradition still unified until its last great representatives in the nineteenth century. When Hegel, the great teacher of speculative idealism, gave his lectures on aesthetics first in Heidelberg and later in Berlin, one of his opening themes was the doctrine that art was for us "a thing of the past."² If we reconstruct Hegel's approach to the question and think it through afresh, we

shall be amazed to discover how much it anticipates the question that we ourselves address to art. I should like to show this briefly by way of introduction so that we understand why it is necessary in the further course of our investigation to go beyond the self-evident character of the dominant concept of art and lay bare the anthropological foundation upon which the phenomenon of art rests and from the perspective of which we must work out a new legitimation for art.

Hegel's remark about art as "a thing of the past" represents a radical and extreme formulation of philosophy's claim to make the process through which we come to know the truth an object of our knowledge and to know this knowledge of the truth in its own right. In Hegel's eyes, this task and this claim, which philosophy has always made, are only fulfilled when philosophy comprehends and gathers up into itself the totality of truth as it has been unfolded in its historical development. Consequently Hegelian philosophy also claimed above all to have comprehended the truth of the Christian message in conceptual form. This included even the deepest mystery of Christian doctrine, the mystery of the trinity. I personally believe that this doctrine has constantly stimulated the course of thought in the West as a challenge and invitation to try and think that which continually transcends the limits of human understanding.

In fact Hegel made the bold claim to have incorporated into his philosophy this most profound mystery – which had developed, sharpened, refined, and deepened the thinking of theologians and philosophers for centuries – and to have gathered the full truth of this Christian doctrine into conceptual form. I do not want to expound here this dialectical synthesis whereby the trinity is understood philosophically, in the Hegelian manner, as a constant resurrection of the spirit. Nevertheless, I must mention it so that we are in a position to understand Hegel's attitude to art and his statement that it is for us a thing of the past. Hegel is not primarily referring to the end of the Christian tradition of pictorial imagery in the West, which, as we believe today, was actually reached then. He did not have the feeling of being plunged into a challenging world of alienation in his time, as we do today when confronted by the production of abstract and nonobjective art. Hegel's own reaction would certainly have been quite different from that of any visitor to the Louvre today who, as soon he enters this marvelous collection of the great fruits of Western painting, is overwhelmed by the

revolutionary subjects and coronation scenes depicted by the revolutionary art of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Hegel certainly did not mean – how could he? – that with the Baroque and its later development in the Rococo, the last Western artistic style had made its appearance on the stage of human history. He did not know, as we know in retrospect, that the century of historicism had begun. Nor could he suspect that in the twentieth century a daring liberation from the historical shackles of the nineteenth century would succeed in making all previous art appear as something belonging to the past in a different and more radical sense. When Hegel spoke of art as a thing of the past he meant that art was no longer understood as a presentation of the divine in the self-evident and unproblematical way in which it had been understood in the Greek world. There the divine was manifest in the temple, which in the southern light stood out against the natural background, open to the eternal powers of nature, and was visibly represented in great sculpture, in human forms shaped by human hands. Hegel's real thesis was that while for the Greeks the god or the divine was principally and properly revealed in their own artistic forms of expression, this became impossible with the arrival of Christianity. The truth of Christianity with its new and more profound insight into the transcendence of God could no longer be adequately expressed within the visual language of art or the imagery of poetic language. For us the work of art is no longer the presence of the divine that we revere. The claim that art is a thing of the past implies that with the close of antiquity, art inevitably appeared to require justification. I have already suggested that what we call the Christian art of the West represents the impressive way in which this legitimation was accomplished over the centuries by the Church and fused with the classical tradition by the humanists.

So long as art occupied a legitimate place in the world, it was clearly able to effect an integration between community, society, and the Church on the one hand and the self-understanding of the creative artist on the other. Our problem, however, is precisely the fact that this self-evident integration, and the universally shared understanding of the artist's role that accompanies it, no longer exists – and indeed no longer existed in the nineteenth century. It is this fact that finds expression in Hegel's thesis. Even then, great artists were beginning to find themselves to a greater or lesser

degree displaced in an increasingly industrialized and commercialized society, so that the modern artist found the old reputation of the itinerant artist of former days confirmed by his own bohemian fate. In the nineteenth century, every artist lived with the knowledge that he could no longer presuppose the former unproblematic communication between himself and those among whom he lived and for whom he created. The nineteenth-century artist does not live within a community, but creates for himself a community as is appropriate to his pluralistic situation. Openly admitted competition combined with the claim that his own particular form of creative expression and his own particular artistic message is the only true one, necessarily gives rise to heightened expectations. This is in fact the messianic consciousness of the nineteenth-century artist, who feels himself to be a "new savior" (Immermann) with a claim on mankind.³ He proclaims a new message of reconciliation and as a social outsider pays the price for this claim, since with all his artistry he is only an artist for the sake of art.

But what is all this compared to the alienation and shock with which the more recent forms of artistic expression in our century tax our self-understanding as a public?

I should like to maintain a tactful silence about the extreme difficulty faced by performing artists when they bring modern music to the concert hall. It can usually only be performed as the middle item in a program – otherwise the listeners will arrive later or leave early. This fact is symptomatic of a situation that could not have existed previously and its significance requires consideration. It expresses the conflict between art as a "religion of culture" on the one hand and art as a provocation by the modern artist on the other. It is an easy matter to trace the beginnings of this conflict and its gradual radicalization in the history of nineteenth-century painting. The new provocation was heralded in the second half of the nineteenth century by the breakdown of the status of linear perspective, which was one of the fundamental presuppositions of the self-understanding of the visual arts as practised in recent centuries.⁴

This can be observed for the first time in the pictures of Hans von Marées. It was later developed by the great revolutionary movement that achieved worldwide recognition through the genius of Paul Cézanne. Certainly linear perspective is not a self-evident fact of artistic vision and expression, since it did not exist at all during the Christian Middle Ages. It was during the Renaissance, a time of a

vigorous upsurge of enthusiasm for all scientific and mathematical construction, that linear perspective became the norm for painting as one of the great wonders of artistic and scientific progress. It is only as we have gradually ceased to expect linear perspective and stopped taking it for granted that our eyes have been opened to the great art of the High Middle Ages. At that time paintings did not recede like views from a window with the immediate foreground passing into the distant horizon. They were clearly to be read like a text written in pictorial symbols, thus combining spiritual instruction with spiritual elevation.

Thus linear perspective simply represented a historical and temporary form of artistic expression. Yet its rejection anticipated more far-reaching developments in modern art, which would take us even further from the previous tradition of artistic form. Here I would draw attention to the destruction of traditional form by Cubism around 1910, a movement in which almost all the great painters of the time participated, at least for some time; and to the further transformation of the Cubist break with tradition, which led to the total elimination of any reference to an external object of the process of artistic creation. It remains an open question whether or not this denial of our realistic expectations is ever really total. But one thing is quite certain: the naive assumption that the picture is a view – like that which we have daily in our experience of nature or of nature shaped by man – has clearly been fundamentally destroyed. We can no longer see a Cubist picture or a nonobjective painting at a glance, with a merely passive gaze. We must make an active contribution of our own and make an effort to synthesize the outlines of the various planes as they appear on the canvas. Only then, perhaps, can we be seized and uplifted by the profound harmony and rightness of a work, in the same way as readily happened in earlier times on the basis of a pictorial content common to all. We shall have to ask what that means for our investigation. Or, again, let me mention modern music and the completely new vocabulary of harmony and dissonance that it employs, or the peculiar complexity it has achieved by breaking the older rules of composition and the principles of musical construction that were characteristic of the classical period. We can no more avoid this than we can avoid the fact that when we visit a museum and enter the rooms devoted to the most recent artistic developments, we really do leave something behind us. If we have been open to the new, we cannot help noticing a

peculiar weakening of our receptiveness when we return to the old. This reaction is clearly only a question of contrast, rather than a lasting experience of a permanent loss, but it brings out the acute difference between these new forms of art and the old.

I would also mention hermetic poetry, which has always been of particular interest to philosophers. For, where no one else can understand, it seems that the philosopher is called for. In fact, the poetry of our time has reached the limits of intelligible meaning and perhaps the greatest achievements of the greatest writers are themselves marked by tragic speechlessness in the face of the unsayable.⁵ Then there is modern drama, which treats the Classical doctrine of the unity of time and action as a relic of the past and consciously and emphatically denies the unity of dramatic character, even making this denial into a formal principle of drama, as in Bertolt Brecht, for example. Then there is the case of modern architecture: what a liberation – or temptation, perhaps – it has been to defy the traditional principles of structural engineering with the help of modern materials and to create something totally new that has no resemblance to the traditional methods of erecting buildings brick upon brick. These buildings seem to teeter upon their slender delicate columns, while the walls, the whole protective outer structure, are replaced by tentlike coverings and canopies. This cursory overview is only intended to bring out what has actually happened and why art today poses a new question. Why does the understanding of what art is today present a task for thinking?

I would like to develop this on various levels. I shall proceed initially from the basic principle that our thinking in this matter must be able to cover the great traditional art of the past, as well as the art of modern times. For although modern art is opposed to traditional art, it is also true that it has been stimulated and nourished by it. We must first presuppose that both are really forms of art and that they do belong together. It is not simply that no contemporary artist could have possibly developed his own daring innovations without being familiar with the traditional language of art. Nor is it simply a matter of saying that we who experience art constantly face the coexistence of past and present. This is not simply the situation in which we find ourselves when we pass from one room to another in a museum or when we are confronted, perhaps reluctantly, with modern music on a concert program or with modern plays in the theater or even with modern reproductions of

Classical art. We are always in this position. In our daily life we proceed constantly through the coexistence of past and future. The essence of what is called spirit lies in the ability to move within the horizon of an open future and an unrepeatable past. Mnemosyne, the muse of memory and recollective appropriation, rules here as the muse of spiritual freedom. The same activity of spirit finds expression in memory and recollection, which incorporates the art of the past along with our own artistic tradition, as well as in recent daring experiments with their unprecedented deformation of form. We shall have to ask ourselves what follows from this unity of what is past and what is present.

But this unity is not only a question of our aesthetic understanding. Our task is not only to recognize the profound continuity that connects the formal language of the past with the contemporary revolution of artistic form. A new social force is at work in the claim of the modern artist. The confrontation with the bourgeois religion of culture and its ritualistic enjoyment of art leads the contemporary artist to try and involve us actively in this claim in various ways. For example, the viewer of a Cubist or a nonobjective painting has to construct it for himself by synthesizing the facets of the different aspects step by step. The claim of the artist is that the new attitude to art that inspires him establishes at the same time a new form of solidarity or universal communication. By this I do not simply mean that the great creative achievements of art are absorbed, or rather diffused, in countless ways into the practical world or the world of decorative design all around us, and so come to produce a certain stylistic unity in the world of human labor. This has always been the case and there is no doubt that the constructivist tendency that we observe in contemporary art and architecture exerts a profound influence on the design of all the appliances we encounter daily in the kitchen, the home, in transport, and in public life. It is no accident that the artist comes to terms with a tension in his work between the expectations harbored by custom and the introduction of new ways of doing things. Our situation of extreme modernity, as exhibited by this kind of conflict and tension, is so striking that it poses a problem for thought.

Two things seem to meet here: our historical consciousness and the self-conscious reflection of modern man and the artist. We should not think of historical awareness in terms of rather scholarly ideas or in terms of world-views. We should simply think of what

we take for granted when confronted with any artistic work of the past. We are not even aware that we approach such things with historical consciousness. We recognize the dress of a bygone age as historical, we accept traditional pictorial subjects presented in various kinds of costume, and we are not surprised when Altdorfer as a matter of course depicts medieval soldiers marching in "modern" troop formations in his painting "The Battle of Issus"—as if Alexander the Great had actually defeated the Persians dressed as we see him there.⁶ This is self-evident to us because our sensibility is historically attuned. I would even go so far as to say that without this historical sensibility we would probably be unable to perceive the precise compositional mastery displayed by earlier art. Perhaps only a person completely ignorant of history, a very rare thing today, would allow himself to be really disturbed by things that are strange in this way. Such a person would be unable to experience in an immediate way that unity of form and content that clearly belongs to the essence of all true artistic creation.

Historical consciousness, then, is not a particularly scholarly method of approach, nor one that is determined by a particular world-view. It is simply the fact that our senses are spiritually organized in such a way as to determine in advance our perception and experience of art. Clearly connected with this is the fact – and this too is a form of self-conscious reflection – that we do not require a naive recognition in which our own world is merely reproduced for us in a timelessly valid form. On the contrary, we are self-consciously aware of both our own great historical tradition as a whole and, in their otherness, even the traditions and forms of quite different cultural worlds that have not fundamentally affected Western history. And we can thereby appropriate them for ourselves. This high level of self-conscious reflection which we all bring with us helps the contemporary artist in his creative activity. Clearly it is the task of the philosopher to investigate the revolutionary manner in which this has come about and to ask why historical consciousness and the new self-conscious reflection arising from it combine with a claim that we cannot renounce: namely, the fact that everything we see stands there before us and addresses us directly as if it showed us ourselves. Consequently I regard the development of the appropriate concepts for the question as the first step in our investigation. First, I shall introduce in relation to philosophical aesthetics the conceptual apparatus with which we intend to tackle the subject in ques-

tion. Then I shall show how the three concepts announced in the title will play a leading role in what follows: the appeal to play, the explication of the concept of the symbol (that is, of the possibility of self-recognition), and finally, the festival as the inclusive concept for regaining the idea of universal communication.

It is the task of philosophy to discover what is common even in what is different. According to Plato, the task of the philosophical dialectician is "to learn to see things together in respect of the one."⁷ What means does the philosophical tradition offer us to solve this problem or to bring it to a clearer understanding of itself? The problem that we have posed is that of bridging the enormous gap between the traditional form and content of Western art and the ideals of contemporary artists. The word *art* itself gives us a first orientation. We should never underestimate what a word can tell us, for language represents the previous accomplishment of thought. Thus we should take the word *art* as our point of departure. Anyone with the slightest historical knowledge is aware that this word has had the exclusive and characteristic meaning that we ascribe to it today for less than two hundred years. In the eighteenth century it was still natural to say "the fine arts" where we today would say "art." For alongside the fine arts were the mechanical arts, and the art in the technical sense of handicrafts and industrial production, which constituted by far the larger part of human skills. Therefore we shall not find our concept of art in the philosophical tradition. But what we can learn from the Greeks, the fathers of Western thought, is precisely the fact that art belongs in the realm of what Aristotle called *poietike episteme*, the knowledge and facility appropriate to production.⁸ What is common to the craftsman's producing and the artist's creating, and what distinguishes such knowing from theory or from practical knowing and deciding is that a work becomes separated from the activity. This is the essence of production and must be borne in mind if we wish to understand and evaluate the limits of the modern critique of the concept of the work, which has been directed against traditional art and the bourgeois cultivation of enjoyment associated with it. The common feature here is clearly the emergence of the work as the intended goal of regulated effort. The work is set free as such and released from the process of production because it is by definition destined for use. Plato always emphasized that the knowledge and skill of the producer are subordinate to considerations of use and depend upon the knowledge of the user of the

product.⁹ In the familiar Platonic example, it is the ship's master who determines what the shipbuilder is to build.¹⁰ Thus the concept of the work points toward the sphere of common use and common understanding as the realm of intelligible communication. But the real question now is how to distinguish "art" from the mechanical arts within this general concept of productive knowledge. The answer supplied by antiquity, which we shall have to consider further, is that here we are concerned with imitative activity. Imitation is thereby brought into relation with the total horizon of *phusis* or nature. Art is only "possible" because the formative activity of nature leaves an open domain which can be filled by the productions of the human spirit. What we call art compared with the formative activity of production in general is mysterious in several respects, inasmuch as the work is not real in the same way as what it represents. On the contrary, the work functions as an imitation and thus raises a host of extremely subtle philosophical problems, including above all the problem of the ontological status of appearance. What is the significance of the fact that nothing "real" is produced here? The work has no real "use" as such, but finds its characteristic fulfillment when our gaze dwells upon the appearance itself. We shall have more to say about this later. But it was clear from the first that we cannot expect any direct help from the Greeks, if they understood what we call art as at best a kind of imitation of nature. Of course, such imitation has nothing to do with the naturalistic or realistic misconceptions of modern art theory. As Aristotle's famous remark in the *Poetics* confirms, "Poetry is more philosophical than history."¹¹ For history only relates how things actually happened, whereas poetry tells us how things may happen and teaches us to recognize the universal in all human action and suffering. Since the universal is obviously the topic of philosophy, art is more philosophical than history precisely because it too intends the universal. This is the first pointer that the tradition of antiquity provides.

A second, more far-reaching point in our considerations of the word *art* leads us beyond the limits of contemporary aesthetics. "Fine art" is in German *die schöne Kunst*, literally "beautiful art." But what is the beautiful?

Even today we can encounter the *concept of the beautiful* in various expressions that still preserve something of the old, original Greek meaning of the word *kalon*. Under certain circumstances, we too connect the concept of the beautiful with the fact that, by es-

tablished custom, there is open recognition that some things are worth seeing or are made to be seen. The expression *die schöne Sittlichkeit* – literally “beautiful ethical life” – still preserves the memory of the Greek ethico-political world which German idealism contrasted with the soulless mechanism of the modern state (Schiller, Hegel). This phrase does not mean that their ethical customs were full of beauty in the sense of being filled with pomp and ostentatious splendor. It means that the ethical life of the people found expression in all forms of communal life, giving shape to the whole and so allowing men to recognize themselves in their own world. Even for us the beautiful is convincingly defined as something that enjoys universal recognition and assent. Thus it belongs to our natural sense of the beautiful that we cannot ask why it pleases us. We cannot expect any advantage from the beautiful since it serves no purpose. The beautiful fulfills itself in a kind of self-determination and enjoys its own self-representation. So much for the word.

Where do we encounter the most convincing self-fulfillment of the essence of the beautiful? In order to understand the effective background of the problem of the beautiful, and perhaps of art as well, we must remember that for the Greeks it was the heavenly order of the cosmos that presented the true vision of the beautiful. This was a Pythagorean element in the Greek idea of the beautiful. We possess in the regular movements of the heavens one of the greatest intuitions of order to be found anywhere. The periodic cycle of the year and of the months, the alternation of day and night, provide the most reliable constants for the experience of order and stand in marked contrast with the ambiguity and instability of human affairs.

From this perspective, the concept of the beautiful, particularly in Plato's thought, sheds a great deal of light on the problem with which we are concerned. In the *Phaedrus* Plato offers us a great mythological description of man's destiny, his limitations compared with the divine, and his attachment to the earthly burden of the sensuous life of the body.¹² Then he describes the marvelous procession of souls that reflects the heavenly movement of the stars by night. There is a chariot race to the vault of the heavens led by the Olympian gods. The human souls also drive their chariots and follow the daily processions of the gods. At the vault of the heavens, the true world is revealed to view. There, in place of the disorder and

inconstancy that characterize our so-called experience of the world down here on earth, we perceive the true constants and unchanging patterns of being. But while the gods surrender themselves totally to the vision of the true world in this encounter, our human souls are distracted because of their unruly natures. They can only cast a momentary and passing glance at the eternal orders, since their vision is clouded by sensuous desire. Then they plunge back toward the earth and leave the truth behind them, retaining only the vaguest remembrance of it. Then we come to the point that I wish to emphasize. These souls who, so to speak, have lost their wings, are weighed down by earthly cares, unable to scale the heights of the truth. There is one experience that causes their wings to grow once again and that allows them to ascend once more. This is the experience of love and the beautiful, the love of the beautiful. Plato describes this experience of growing love in a wonderful and elaborate fashion and relates it to the spiritual perception of the beautiful and the true orders of the world. It is by virtue of the beautiful that we are able to acquire a lasting remembrance of the true world. This is the way of philosophy. Plato describes the beautiful as that which shines forth most clearly and draws us to itself, as the very visibility of the ideal.¹³ In the beautiful presented in nature and art, we experience this convincing illumination of truth and harmony, which compels the admission: "This is true."

The important message that this story has to teach is that the essence of the beautiful does not lie in some realm simply opposed to reality. On the contrary, we learn that however unexpected our encounter with beauty may be, it gives us an assurance that the truth does not lie far off and inaccessible to us, but can be encountered in the disorder of reality with all its imperfections, evils, errors, extremes, and fateful confusions. The ontological function of the beautiful is to bridge the chasm between the ideal and the real. Thus the qualification of art as "beautiful" or "fine" provides a second essential clue for our consideration.

A third step leads us directly to *aesthetics* as it is called in the history of philosophy. As a late development aesthetics coincided, significantly enough, with the process by which art proper was detached from the sphere of technical facility; and with this emancipation it came to acquire the quasi-religious function that it possesses for us now, both in theory and practice.

As a philosophical discipline, aesthetics only emerged during the

age of rationalism in the eighteenth century. It was obviously stimulated by modern rationalism itself, which was based upon the development of the constructive sciences of nature in the seventeenth century, sciences which, by their breathtakingly rapid transformation into technology, have in turn come to shape the face of our world.

What led philosophy to turn its attention to the beautiful? The experience of art and beauty seems to be a realm of utterly subjective caprice compared with the rationalist's exclusive orientation toward the mathematical regularities of nature and its significance for the control of natural forces. For this was the great breakthrough of the seventeenth century. What claims can the phenomenon of the beautiful have in this context? Our recourse to ancient thought helps us to see that in art and the beautiful we encounter a significance that transcends all conceptual thought. How do we grasp this truth? Alexander Baumgarten, the founder of philosophical aesthetics, spoke of a *cognitio sensitiva* or "sensuous knowledge."¹⁴ This idea is a paradoxical one for the traditional conception of knowledge as it has been developed since the Greeks. We can only speak of knowledge proper when we have ceased to be determined by the subjective and the sensible and have come to grasp the universal, the regularity in things. Then the sensible in all its particularity only enters the scene as a particular case of a universal law. Now clearly in our experience of the beautiful, in nature and in art, we neither verify our expectations, nor record what we encounter as a particular case of the universal. An enchanting sunset does not represent a case of sunsets in general. It is rather a unique sunset displaying the "tragedy of the heavens." And in the realm of art above all, it is self-evident that the work of art is not experienced in its own right if it is only acknowledged as a link in a chain that leads elsewhere. The "truth" that it possesses for us does not consist in some universal regularity that merely presents itself through the work. Rather, *cognitio sensitiva* means that in the apparent particularity of sensuous experience, which we always attempt to relate to the universal, there is something in our experience of the beautiful that arrests us and compels us to dwell upon the individual appearance itself.

What is the relevance of this fact? What do we learn from this? What is the importance and significance of this particular experience which claims truth for itself, thereby denying that the universal expressed by the mathematical formulation of the laws of nature is

the only kind of truth? It is the task of philosophical aesthetics to supply an answer to this question.¹⁵ And it is useful to ask which of the arts is likely to provide the best answer. We recognize the great variety and range of artistic activities that stretches from the transitory arts of music and spoken language to the static arts like painting and sculpture and architecture. The different media in which human art finds expression allow its products to appear in a different light, but we can suggest an answer to this question if it is approached from a historical point of view. Baumgarten once defined aesthetics as the *ars pulchre cogitandi* or the “art of thinking beautifully.”¹⁶ Anyone with a sensitive ear will immediately notice that this expression has been formed on analogy with the definition of rhetoric as the *ars bene dicendi* or the “art of speaking well.” This relationship is not accidental, for rhetoric and poetics have belonged together since antiquity, and in a sense, rhetoric took precedence over poetics. Rhetoric is the universal form of human communication, which even today determines our social life in an incomparably more profound fashion than does science. The classic definition of rhetoric as the “art of speaking well” carries immediate conviction. Baumgarten clearly based his definition of aesthetics as the “art of thinking beautifully” on this definition. There is an important suggestion here that the arts of language may well play a special part in solving the problems that we have set ourselves. This is all the more important since the leading concepts that govern our aesthetic considerations usually start from the opposite direction. Our reflection is almost always oriented toward the visual arts, and it is in that realm that our aesthetic concepts are most readily applied. There are good reasons for this. It is not simply on account of the visible presence of static art, in contrast to the transitory nature of drama, music, or poetry, which present themselves only fleetingly. It is surely because the Platonic heritage permeates all our reflections upon the beautiful. Plato conceived true being as the original image, and the world of appearance as the reflected image, of this exemplary original.¹⁷ There is something convincing about this as far as art is concerned, as long as we do not trivialize it. In order to understand our experience of art, we are tempted to search the depths of mystical language for daring new words like the German *Anbild* – an expression that captures both the image and the viewing of it.¹⁸ For it is true that we both elicit the image from things and imaginatively project the image into things in one and the same process. Thus