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Volume 9 Numbers 2 & 3

- 141 Larry Arnhart The Rationality of Political Speech:
An Interpretation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*
- 155 Jan H. Blits Manliness and Friendship
in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*
- 169 Mary Nichols *The Winter's Tale*:
The Triumph of Comedy over Tragedy
- 191 Jerry Weinberger On Bacon's *Advertisement Touching A Holy War*
- 207 John Parsons, Jr. On Sir William Temple's
Political and Philosophical Teaching
- 229 Susan Power John Locke:
Revolution, Resistance, or Opposition?
- 245 Barry Cooper The Politics of Performance: An Interpretation
of Bolingbroke's Political Theory
- 263 Philip J. Kain Labor, the State, and Aesthetic Theory in the
Writings of Schiller
- 279 Michael H. Mitias Law as the Basis of the State: Hegel
- 301 Stanley Corngold Dilthey's Essay *The Poetic Imagination*:
A Poetics of Force
- 339 Kent A. Kirwan Historicism and Statesmanship
in the Reform Argument of Woodrow Wilson
- 353 Richard Velkley Gadamer and Kant: The Critique of Modern
Aesthetic Consciousness in *Truth and Method*
- 365 Robert C. Grady Bertrand de Jouvenel:
Order, Legitimacy, and the Model of Rousseau
- 385 William R. Marty Rawls and the Harried Mother
- 397 Jürgen Gebhardt Ideology and Reality:
The Ideologue's Persuasion in Modern Politics
- 415 Kenneth W. Thompson Science, Morality, and Transnationalism
- Discussion*
- 427 Peter T. Manicas The Crisis of Contemporary Political Theory:
on Jacobson's *Pride and Solace*
- Book Reviews*
- 437 Patrick Coby *The Spirit of Liberalism*,
by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.
- 439 Will Morrisey *Political Parties in the Eighties*,
edited by Robert A. Goldwin

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Volume 9 numbers 2 & 3

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GADAMER AND KANT: THE CRITIQUE OF MODERN AESTHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN TRUTH AND METHOD

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One way of becoming aware of an ancient and nearly forgotten mode of thinking is through the critical discussion of a modern and familiar mode. Such discussion forms an essential part of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical inquiry. The interpretation of a modern thinker or position is already a kind of transcending of it, insofar as the interpretation of it brings into being a manner of questioning and openness to questions that is akin to ancient dialectic. But this occurs only when the interpretation is not guided from the start by a fixed position or thesis of its own. Ancient philosophy at its peak saw the goal of philosophy to be the sustained awareness of the fundamental problems of human life; philosophy was distinguished from flashes of insight, on the one hand, and from a closed body of knowledge or science, on the other. Philosophy was a way of life, a habit or *hexis* of the soul. This view was in keeping with an account of the relation of knowledge to the soul, according to which knowing is an activity that strengthens itself through the encounter with that which is knowable to the highest degree. Knowing is always a beginning of further knowing, and not an end-point to knowing; this can only be the case if the highest knowledge is self-knowledge.¹ This Socratic discovery was equivalent to the insight that the cosmological order is not that which is knowable to the highest degree.

Gadamer recalls these views for us when he writes that understanding is not only a motion toward a meaning, "but the accomplished understanding constitutes the state of a new intellectual freedom";² this is because when one understands, one "knows one's way" with what one understands, or because one knows what is good and useful in what one understands. All understanding points toward self-understanding. At the same time, all self-understanding occurs through the effort to understand another. Such a view of philosophy cannot be alien to any genuine philosopher, that is to say, to a great modern philosopher as well as to an ancient philosopher. For insofar as we can discover the essential problems of thought through the interpretation of any great philosopher, we discover also that there is a sense in which philosophy in the West transcends the distinction between ancient and modern.

Truth and Method would bring to light for us a nearly forgotten understanding of truth, which has been obscured by the modern methodological ideal of knowl-

This essay is a slightly revised version of an address delivered at a conference on the Thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer, held in November 1978 at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

¹Aristotle, *De Anima* 429a29-b9.

²H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975. A translation of *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen, 1960), p. 231.

edge. An essential part of this recovery is the disclosure of the “question of truth as it emerges in the experience of art.”³ The truth manifest in works of art has been distorted in modern times by the idea of “aesthetics,” We must make the effort to transcend this idea, which underlies a general way of thinking about art and beauty, and which we can call the “aesthetic consciousness.”⁴ The foremost philosophical thinker behind the idea of aesthetics is Kant. In order to transcend aesthetics we must uncover its basis in Kant’s “Analytic of the Aesthetic Judgement,” in his *Critique of Judgement*.⁵ This uncovering is not the same thing as a critique of Kant from some already established alternative point of view; we would not have to interpret Kant if we had already acquired an alternative to him, if indeed there is simply such a thing. Gadamer’s hermeneutical interpretation of Kant’s account of taste is a movement of thinking that would bring us into the region of problems wherein something like “aesthetics” can emerge and wherein its limitations can appear. What I hope to do, in a very limited way, is to indicate a few points one might remember from along the path of movement of this thinking, which one might use for oneself again at a later time.

The main thesis of the paper is the following: The philosophical hermeneutics of *Truth and Method* has, as one of its central concerns, the aim of recovering an understanding of the beautiful, and therewith, of art, as the primary starting point of human self-understanding, both for man as moral-political being and for philosophical reflection. I think one can call this point of view, which is wholly outside the range of thinking called “aesthetics,” a Platonic understanding of the beautiful. For Plato, following Socrates, the poets are our first educators. They, rather than the cosmologists and sophists, provide the philosopher with the primary material of reflection; the poets, as contrasted with the cosmologists and sophists, have superior self-reflection. The Platonic view of poetry entails that man, as he is known first to himself, is not a “natural individual” but a being formed by a tradition, or by opinions about the gods and human things, as expressed in poetry. As we shall see, the modern aesthetic consciousness is inseparable from moral individualism; the critique of aesthetics is at the same time a critique of a certain modern morality. (The name of Plato should not be the only name mentioned here; the hermeneutical critique of aesthetics closely follows Hegel’s critique of Kant and of enlightenment individualism.) The connection between aesthetics and moral individualism is expressed with unparalleled clarity by Kant in his “Critique of the Aesthetic Judgement.” The manner in which Gadamer exposes this connection in Kant’s thought is the main subject of this paper. But before I proceed with that discussion, I must place the hermeneutical concept of truth before us, in a preliminary way, for it is this concept that would

³Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, “First Part: The Question of Truth as it Emerges in the Experience of Art,” pp. 5-150.

⁴Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, “The Transcending of the Aesthetic Dimension,” pp. 5-90.

⁵Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, “The Subjectivisation of Aesthetics in the Kantian Critique,” pp. 39-51.

disclose a sense of truth more fundamental than any scientific account of the truth about man: the truth that is manifest in a tradition. Science or philosophy cannot understand itself if it does not know its own starting point; hermeneutics would disclose the nature of the necessary starting point of self-reflection.

I

In broaching the issue of the hermeneutical concept of truth, I wish to stress two aspects of the issue: (1) the hermeneutical account of the dependence of all thinking upon a tradition and upon the language of a tradition; (2) the inevitable distortion of the character of tradition and language as the primary spheres of the revelation of truth by the objective sciences. In opening up a prospect upon these issues, I will indicate how the fundamental problem of Western philosophy or metaphysics, the attempt to acquire a science of the whole, is the background to hermeneutical questioning.

An essential moment of the hermeneutical account of truth in *Truth and Method* is the hermeneutical account of human existence developed by Heidegger. He established the priority of the truth revealed in the existence of human "being-there" to the truths of the objective sciences, that is, to the a priori of the exact sciences or to the methodologies of human sciences. The ultimate sense of science must be found in the concerned understanding of man whose situation as a whole must be first manifest to him, in its urgency, as grounded in his finitude. Truth in this primary sense cannot be a construct or a criterion given in advance in the human faculties; it is the openness of the problem of existence, whose ultimate ground is obscure. Truth is both manifest and obscure; truth is "being" as a whole that is behind the investigation of the sciences into "beings." Man is "thrown" into a situation whose ground is necessarily hidden to him; man has no insight into the origin of his "being-there." He therefore can take no recourse to an eternal order of nature or to a highest being to make sense of this "fact" of existence. Such a move on the part of the philosophy can only obscure the fact that understanding occurs only where this is obscurity, that is, only finite beings can understand or philosophize; therefore such beings must understand themselves in the light of their own situation. The understanding of the human situation out of and through that situation is called "hermeneutics of facticity."⁶

One can argue that this account of understanding in the light of mortal human existence was modified later by Heidegger, such that the primary standpoint because for him the truth of being as manifest to man through language, art, and tradition, as supra-individual events of historical existence. The primary stress on individual care and anxiety in *Being and Time* was corrected. But again the point is that understanding can only occur because a primary truth is already manifest and addresses man, makes a claim upon him: This truth is the particular fate announced

⁶Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 225-34.

by "being"; in essence, it is tradition. This truth manifest in the great works of artists, philosophers, and statesmen is the sole basis we have for forming our self-understanding and for raising philosophical questions. It provides the fundamental "pre-understanding" that guides understanding. Man does not think as an isolated individual, as a natural unit, as a subject with its *cogito*. Gadamer has developed this account of the positive role of traditional "pre-understanding" or of prejudice, as a fundamental aspect of hermeneutics. Language, through which tradition speaks, is also what speaks when the individual speaks; but "language" here means primarily the classical peaks of a tradition, for all great works, even those of music and the visual arts, form the most fundamental stratum of "language." "Tradition" is not equivalent (without qualification) to "ordinary language." Tradition and language are the true whole of human thought and experience; they are "ontologically" prior to the subject and the will, as well as to scientific methodology. Yet it cannot be said that there is an ultimate metaphysical ground for tradition and language. These manifest themselves as the "event" of being; that event is the openness of man's situation as a whole coming about in the only way it can come about, through tradition and language as an unlimited medium, one that is never completable or wholly overtaken by the mind. The notion of an unlimited and unlimitable medium of thought in hermeneutical philosophy takes the place of the limiting notions of "substance," "ground," or "idea" in earlier philosophy. One difficulty that arises here: How can an unlimited medium come to reflect on itself or criticize itself?

Heidegger and Gadamer have reflected on the ways in which the established sciences necessarily distort the character of truth as this historical event of man's becoming open to his elusive situation as a whole. Science as such must abstract from the whole by bringing a part of it to the foreground; the elusive background, the "being" that is the whole in which "beings" arise is necessarily concealed by science. This is not to say that we must or can reject science; but we must become aware of the partiality it imposes on our understanding and conceals from itself. What science has never yet adequately realized is this fact about itself and its consequences. Science necessarily makes its own presupposition, the tradition that grounds it, less available to our understanding. This means we require the development of the hermeneutical insight into the essential fragility of tradition, its tendency to be forgotten, to be concealed, by science itself. At no previous moment in history has the continuing existence of tradition been so problematic as at the present moment; at the same time, the truth of the fragility of truth has never before been so apparent.

At the center of the problem of the necessary distortion or concealment of truth by science is metaphysics, which has been the attempt to attain the science of the whole itself. Metaphysics is the basis of all Western science. It is the essence of science's concealing character. That essence consists in the placing of man in the foreground of being, and in the concealing of the true whole of elusive being, by the subordination of the whole to the mastery of one part, the *animal rationale*. The

essence of Greek metaphysics at the basis of our science is humanism. Hermeneutical thought does not pretend to be able to jump over this tradition in the West toward the true whole of being. It therefore rejects Nietzsche's call for the creation of a new culture through the assertion of the will to power; this demand only represents the most extreme stage of humanism and metaphysics. Nietzsche's example shows us how our thinking is still dependent on metaphysics. More generally, the dependence of all thought on language entails that the concealment of the whole is a defining moment of existence, not only of human existence. The whole itself is finite being. In going beyond or behind metaphysics, hermeneutical thought does not arrive at a comprehensive or infinite standpoint. It extends and deepens the modern critique of metaphysics when it discovers why metaphysics could never genuinely attain knowledge of the whole; it includes modern "methodologism" within that critique.

By "methodologism" one means the central concern of a modern form of thinking, which displaces the metaphysical quest from the search for a highest cause of nature to the quest for the "clear and distinct" or self-evident notions of the "subject," which enable its methodical mastery of the natural world as a whole. Only later does this displacement become known as "epistemology," by which time its original meaning has become forgotten. For hermeneutical thought, the history of philosophy, from metaphysics to mastery of nature, then to epistemology, is the history of a progressive closing up of human openness to the whole.

Now I have some basis for turning to the theme of aesthetics as developed by philosophical hermeneutics. The critique of methodological thinking is an extension of the critique of metaphysics, and aesthetics is one form of methodological thinking. Aesthetics as formulated by Kant is a manifestation of the modern search for a priori knowledge; one could say it is the search for "epistemological foundations" of the experience of the beautiful and the sublime. The modern search for "the a priori" is part of a larger project to emancipate human reason from traditional authority, as well as the authority of the natural whole. We call this project "enlightenment." Every form of enlightenment philosophy involves some kind of "methodological abstraction" from nature, or from the "concrete whole," to speak as a Hegelian, whether this occurs in metaphysics, in the account of man as social and moral, or in the account of beauty. "Emancipation" and "abstraction" are inseparable; both are incompatible with "openness to being." Aesthetics is the approach of emancipated reason toward the phenomena of art and beauty. Hermeneutics develops a critique of this emancipated and enlightened standpoint, which characterizes our culture as a whole: this whole outlook on art can be called the "aesthetic consciousness." In its most extreme and most relativistic form, this consciousness reduces the beautiful to an experience of the human consciousness as human. We shall see that this was not Kant's intention, although his thought may point in that direction. Kant still ascribed a certain suprahuman significance to the beautiful. Gadamer's very dialectical discussion of Kant's aesthetic doctrine reveals how Kant "subjectivized" the experience of beauty, but at the same time,

regarded it within a teleological framework, albeit of a modern sort. I believe that one discovers a point of convergence of the Kantian and hermeneutical accounts of beauty, in that both seek to preserve a suprahuman dimension of the beautiful on the basis of a turning away from theoretical metaphysics. For Kant, that suprahuman dimension that is manifest in the human is freedom; for philosophical hermeneutics it is tradition. Freedom and tradition are two ways of understanding the good, or the noble. One might say that they are both “authentic” understandings of the noble, which do not take their bearings by religious or revealed accounts of the suprahuman, nor by theoretical metaphysics.

Therefore there is an implicit teleology in each account of the beautiful. For Kant the teleology is of a future world of rational beings who have achieved autonomy and find contentment in that achievement; it is a teleology that points toward a philosophy of history, while at the same time renouncing the possibility of philosophy of history. The hermeneutical account of tradition is not future-oriented and implies no doctrine of progress, and therefore implies no theory of universal rational humanity. “History” or “tradition” is only the particular history of the interpretation of the basis of a tradition, its classical basis; this basis defines humanity or the noble for the given tradition only. Nevertheless, the Western tradition with its Greek classical basis is peculiarly open to the problem of being or to the question of “What is.” Hermeneutics is itself a development of this special openness. The special mode of being of Western tradition, with its basis in philosophy, is the theme of hermeneutics, if I am not mistaken. The beautiful plays a crucial role in this tradition, as the harbinger of the good, and as the first manifestation of an order that exists always, and to which human reason may ascend, through its own efforts. But this order was called into question by modern science and the critique of metaphysics. The beautiful then comes to point toward the mysterious order of human freedom and creativity; we see this happening in Kant’s thought. Out of this direction of thinking there arises the aesthetic consciousness, which rejects all suprahuman order behind the beautiful, finding instead that its source, if at all knowable, is human inwardness or the creative “self.” Has hermeneutical thought introduced a new alternative, which seeks to disclose that the mysterious and inaccessible origins of tradition are the standard of humanity in a tradition and the order behind the manifestness of beauty?

II

Having made these general remarks on hermeneutics, let us inquire further into the question: What is the “aesthetic consciousness”? Gadamer describes it as the reduction of the significance of art and beauty to subjective and private enjoyment of a merely formal sort, or to the pleasure of “the free play of the faculties.” The work of art loses its independent authority to educate us when it is reduced to such private acts of enjoyment; thus the aesthetic consciousness relates to its object, art, as historical relativism relates to its object, history or tradition. I

think we easily recognize this phenomenon of modern culture; it is in fact almost the essence of what we mean by "culture." The aesthetic consciousness does not approach great art humbly, seeking to be formed by it, but as a self-willed spectator of the panoply of tastes and styles that are placed together helter-skelter, in a display of universal openness to all human experiences. In fact, however, human experience, which is in the first place that of a traditional way of life, is left behind in favor of an abstraction called "pure artistic content." A vain reference to "cultural context" does nothing to restore the original weight of the work of art to its own tradition. Above all else, the aesthetic consciousness does not seek philosophical instruction from art; philosophical questions are replaced by questions of style and form. In the end, the aesthetic consciousness cannot make sense of its own arbitrary standpoint over and against the work of art; its experiences of art, having no authority outside of its own abstract enjoyment, are unrelated and discontinuous; there is no solid core of the being of this consciousness, either in history or tradition or in philosophy.

One can consider the aesthetic consciousness as a paradigm case of a widespread difficulty, which has been called the emergence of modern subjectivism or individualism. Gadamer's thoughts on aesthetics point to a Platonic alternative to this modern stance. Classical-humanist education begins with the education of taste as an element in the moral-political formation of character that may culminate in the study of philosophy; I am of course referring above all to the Platonic prescription of music and gymnastic as the first instruction of the future guardians of the best city.⁷ Musical education as described in the *Republic* is crucial to the harmonization of the passions with reason, and to the creation of a character that is at the same time courageous and ready for spirited action, and moderate and gentle in its bearing toward fellow citizens. Very clearly, the aesthetic consciousness spells the demise of this ideal. This consciousness replaces the first concern of man, with education for the sake of virtue and the life of his own community, in which he must live and act, with quite derivative concerns. Hermeneutics is concerned with our being as formed by tradition, therefore it is concerned with education as the continuing life of tradition; for this reason it is concerned with the human sciences. These have lost the understanding of their own proper element, which loss was effected in the first place by the destruction of the original place of taste (including here the art of rhetoric) within the whole of an education. In short, taste was deprived of moral and political meaning by the aesthetic consciousness. But this was most decisively prepared by Kant's "subjectivisation" of taste. Gadamer's discussion of aesthetics therefore revolves around the encounter of Kantian thought with the classical-humanist tradition.

Kant's description of the aesthetic judgment takes the form of a "transcendental," that is, a priori, legitimation of the principles of taste. Let us recall the basic features of his argument. According to Kant, the pleasure one takes in the

⁷Plato, *The Republic*, 376c-412b.

judgment of beautiful forms is wholly nonconceptual and subjective; it says nothing about the intrinsic character of the object judged. One could speak of a "methodological abstraction" from the nature of the object in describing the aesthetic judgment. Our concern in this judgment is in fact only with the judging itself; that is, in judging a certain form as beautiful we are only showing an appreciation of the appropriateness of this form for the play of our rational faculties with it. The form is not related to a definite concept; we judge that it is purposive for the activity of imagination in relation to the ideas of order in the understanding; the given form is pleasing because it instigates an activity of the imagination that is both free and orderly. The methodological abstraction of "form" from the object is here, as elsewhere in similar abstractions of modern thought, made for the sake of "freedom," or in Kantian terms, for the sake of the "purity" of aesthetic judgment. Our judgment that a given form is purposive in this way, is at the same time a judgment that it will be so for every rational being, since the faculties are basically the same in all rational beings. The judgment of taste refers the given form to a universal community of taste; therefore the judgment is by its nature normative: this thing *should* be judged as beautiful. The judgment of taste is, therefore, that a given subjective pleasure in a form is universally communicable, and therefore it has a priori character, although it is subjective.

Because the judgment of taste is one of universal communicability, of a pleasure, it is a kind of "common sense," or *sensus communis*. For Kant it is the only such common sense human beings have. Gadamer points out that this involves a drastic reduction of the meaning of *sensus communis*, as it came to Kant from the classical-humanist tradition. Among other examples cited, Gadamer's citation of Shaftesbury is very helpful.⁸ For Shaftesbury, steeped in Platonic tradition, the *sensus communis* is a sense of humanity and of the common good, of communal sympathies and traditional experiences, which is communicated on the level of feeling in the phenomena of taste and wit; it is among the virtues of a statesman to possess this common sense, for, as a social virtue, it is closely related to prudence. Kant's narrowing of the common sense to the aesthetic judgment, excluding from it the sense of sociality or humanity, is a decisive moment in both his moral doctrine and his aesthetic doctrine. Morality as grounded in the pure rational law of the categorical imperative must exclude any foundation in natural sociality or the related experience of taste. Kantian morality involves another "methodological abstraction," in this case, from natural dispositions of the human being. This shows to us that Kantian morality entails a denial of man's natural sociality, and is in its essence highly individualistic in a modern way; the experience of loyalty to a particular community or tradition is for Kant a distraction from the universal and cosmopolitan aim of true morality. The autonomy of the Kantian moral man must remind us of the self-sufficiency of Rousseau's natural man realized at the level of society. And in fact Kant's reduction of the *sensus communis*

⁸Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 24-33.

to taste can be correlated with his turning away from the English moral sense theory, and with his simultaneous reception of Rousseau's account of man's natural goodness and asociality, as the foundation for a morality of autonomy. (This occurred in the unpublished *Remarks to the Observations, etc.*⁹) Kant's final doctrine of the aesthetic judgment assigns to taste a negligible role in the education of morality. Taste can help to create a moral disposition through the refinement of the inclinations, but this is a small matter in a morality based upon the disregard of inclination.¹⁰

But Gadamer points out that this vast reduction of the moral significance of taste in Kant does not lead immediately to the "aesthetic consciousness"; for in point of fact, the moral significance Kant does ascribe to taste is absolutely crucial to the character of the judgment of taste. But the moral sense of taste is now not that of natural sympathy or sociality, but that of autonomy or freedom. This alone makes comprehensible two crucial features of the aesthetic doctrine: the relative demotion of artistic beauty in relation to natural beauty, and the understanding of fine art as the art of genius.

III

Within the scope of this paper, it is possible only to touch upon matters that are of great moment not only for aesthetics but also for subsequent philosophy altogether. A few points should be mentioned. The overarching consideration here is what Gadamer brings forth in a compelling way: Kant's primary interest in the aesthetic judgment is teleological; his primary concern is a systematic one: to show the unity of two forms of judgment, that of taste and that of the purposiveness of natural organisms.¹¹ The judgment of taste is teleological insofar as a given form is judged as purposive for the free play of the faculties with it. But that free play is "purest" and most disinterested when the given form is a natural one, for there is no element of human interestedness, no expression of human artifice and intention in natural beauty, as there must be in a work of art made by human beings for human beings. The free pleasure of this purest judgment of taste is remarkably analogous to the disinterested respect for the moral law. Natural beauty seems to bring to light and to promote man's capacity for a free pleasure akin to moral feeling; therefore it seems in the phenomenon of beauty, that nature has a kind of regard for the rational faculties. This apparent regard, which can be no more than a subjective postulate, points toward the ultimate unity of nature and freedom, toward the reality of a "supersensible substrate" behind the phenomenal world that

⁹*Kants Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin and New York: Prussian Academy of Sciences, 1902-), XX pp. 1-192 (*Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, 1764-65).

¹⁰Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, (trans. J. H. Bernard of *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790. New York: Hafner, 1951), Sec. 60, "Of the Method of Taste," pp. 200-02.

¹¹Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 46-51.

may promote, in ways inscrutable to human understanding, the ultimate realization of universal freedom in a "moral world." Therefore the priority of natural beauty to works of art in the analytic of taste has a moral basis. But it, we must remember, is not that of a morality based on inclination, on sociality, or on tradition. It is not a morality with a basis in human nature, but in freedom, which is something suprahuman. Man encounters something both other to himself, and yet within himself, in natural beauty. Certainly there are important theological implications behind this conception of something suprahuman shining through the human experience of nature. I think one should recall here, among other considerations, Rousseau's apotheosis of nature and of natural freedom.

The moral priority given to natural beauty within the analysis of the judgment of taste points toward the aesthetics of genius, which lie outside the confines of the problem of taste proper. Genius, as the natural inspiration that gives the rule to art, is the true standard of good art for Kant. Gadamer's discussion reveals the systematic significance of this move from the discussion of taste to that of genius.

Genius gives expression to human freedom, as natural and unmediated by the experiences of social mores, classical rules of form, and religious symbolism. This ideal of genius is certainly moral as well as aesthetic. We admire the work of genius because it reveals to us the mysterious human power to create the wholly new that eludes our comprehension. The secular cult of genius, coming after Kant, is the celebration of freedom as the essence of man, or of man's capacity to make himself in Promethean fashion, in defiance of a suprahuman order. Kant had argued that man's nature or completion is unknowable, and thus had argued that freedom or perfectibility is man's essence, the essence that eludes theoretical understanding. Insofar as the significance of beauty must lie in its revealing to man the reality of freedom in the play of the faculties, we see the inner connection between the high place given to natural beauty, and the celebration of genius in the sphere of art. The work of art, which may have some conceptual content, points less toward the reality of freedom, than does creativity itself, which is unconscious and unguided by rules. The conceptual content of art brings a certain "compulsion" or "interest" to the judging faculties, which impinges upon their freedom. In this account of the significance of art, we see the work of art, as a source for our self-discovery and instruction, taking second place to the experiences of its free creator. The further development of this approach is the aesthetics of experience or of *Erlebnis*: art as an immediate expression of a subjective state of mind. After Kant, genius displaces taste as the central notion of aesthetics; in this we have the emergence of the "aesthetic consciousness," strictly speaking.

Now to return to the theme of teleology in Kant. The teleological interest of Kant is in postulating the existence of finite rational beings, such as man, as the final purpose of the natural whole. Freedom is the true *telos* of nature; taken in itself, nature has no *telos*.¹² One could say that this was the only teleology Kant

¹²Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Sec. 84, "Of the Final Purpose of the Existence of a World, i.e., of Creation Itself," pp. 284-86.

saw yet possible after the destruction of the older cosmological teleology by Newtonian science. Thus Gadamer states that the *Critique of Judgment* restores teleology after it had been destroyed by the *Critique of Pure Reason*: it restores teleology not as theoretical metaphysics but as a subjective postulate for the sake of morality. The analytic of aesthetic judgment stands under this project. One could argue that Kant's stress on the freedom or "purity" of aesthetic judgment would be in tension with his moral-teleological interest were this interest not in "freedom" itself. In any case, this teleology no longer understands the "perfection" of the kinds of natural beings to be the standard of the beautiful. Gadamer writes that Kant's aesthetic achieves "the dissolution of ancient cosmological thought, which assigned man his place in the total structure of being and to each existent its goal of perfection."¹³ In sum, one can say that the new account of taste as the *sensus communis* points to the destruction of two ways in which the classical-humanist tradition had seen man: as a subordinate part of a community that supersedes his will qua individual, and as a subordinate part of a natural whole that supersedes his existence qua species.

IV

The ultimate goal of Gadamer's hermeneutical study, if I understand it properly, is a reflection on truth, insofar as it is revealed in language, history, and works of art, which opens up for us the prospect of recovering a metaphysical sense of the beautiful. Here one of the sources of illumination is Plato; and again, in these concluding pages of *Truth and Method* wherein the "metaphysics of the beautiful" is discussed, the other point of orientation is Kant.¹⁴ And now the positive achievement of Kantian aesthetics is brought forth. Kant understood both that the beautiful cannot be reduced to the useful, and that the rationalistic aesthetics of perfection could not grasp the nature of its transcendence. The pre-Kantian metaphysical cosmology of the beautiful is not Gadamer's point of return. We cannot talk about the natural ground of the beautiful; instead, the beautiful is that which manifests itself; it is present in its appearance in the beautiful object. There is no *chorismos* between the idea of the beautiful and its manifestation. This is the advantage of the beautiful when compared with the good; for ideas of virtue never manifest themselves with the immediacy and certainty of beautiful things. Perhaps this is the meaning of the Platonic phrase that Gadamer quotes: in the attempt to lay hold on the good itself, the good takes flight into the beautiful. And it is striking that the early Kant of the *Remarks* already referred to, speaks of the beautiful as a kind of "perfection completed in itself" that reminds us of the self-sufficiency of moral virtue, but is yet different from it.¹⁵ If I understand Gadamer correctly, he is showing us a way of integrating the experience of beauty back into the whole

¹³Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 47.

¹⁴Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, "The Universal Aspect of Hermeneutics," pp. 431-47.

¹⁵*Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, XX (*Bemerkungen*), esp. pp. 118, 133-34, 167-68.

context of human life; he is attempting to overcome, with the aid of certain thinkers of the past, the “methodological abstraction” of modern thought, primarily through a consideration of the role of the beautiful within the human “whole.” And its role in this context is precisely that of giving us the initial points of orientation in the world, which cannot be found through scientific procedure. The beautiful, including the morally beautiful, establishes the initial hierarchy or the initial structure of the world. The immediate manifestness of the beautiful is what we see first in the world. “The beautiful charms us, without its being immediately integrated with the whole of our orientations and evaluations.”¹⁶ Being by nature a “beginning,” the beautiful cannot be merely contemplated; it demands on our part “interpretation.” Thus its “immediacy,” or its advantage, may contain a deception: that of finality.

The connections with the hermeneutical concept of truth should be apparent. As living and “finite” beings, we are never confronted with a total disclosure of “subject,” or “substance,” or with any completed whole; the beautiful is not manifest in the “subject,” and not in a final order or hierarchy of things. The beautiful is irreducible, but it is also not a unity or a whole. For its nature, which is to point and thus to be a beginning for us, also cannot be surpassed or subordinated by us to anything limiting it. The beautiful is a beginning that is never surpassed; human life is disclosed by it as always beginning. Yet the nature of this motion, while not perfectible, is good. Its goodness consists not in measurable progress (not even a progress *ab quo*), not in mastery (whether of self or nature), and thus not in a modern sense of freedom. The beautiful brings forth the good in granting the realization of the ultimacy of the difference between life as character and death as soul without character; but character partakes of the unlimitedness of activity. Whether a human soul is living or dead depends on whether its “object” has the character of the beautiful, or some other. But this amounts to asking: Is the measure of the soul “fitting” to it or alien to it? Does the soul know its own measure? The beautiful, itself immeasurable, is the only measure of freedom; for this reason its nature is elusive, although the beautiful alone permits any precision to exist in the world. At this point, we see that hermeneutics is reaching *its* limit: it must become “psychology.”

In any event, there can be no position further removed from the aesthetic consciousness than this one: that the beautiful is the harbinger of the good. We will remain thankful to Gadamer for opening to us again a way back to original experiences that were almost wholly forgotten.

¹⁶Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 442.