



On Some Pitfalls of the English Edition and Translation of Bolzano's Aesthetic Treatises

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CRITICAL NOTE

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ABSTRACT

This critical note examines Bernard Bolzano's *Essays on Beauty and the Arts*, edited by Dominic McIver Lopes and translated by Adam Bresnahan. The book presents English translations of Bolzano's 'On the Concept of the Beautiful' (1843) and 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts' (1849), supplemented by an extensive scholarly apparatus. This note focuses on Lopes's interpretation of Bolzano's aesthetic treatises, particularly addressing the insufficient historical contextualization. Additionally, some challenges and intricacies involved in translating Bolzano's work into English are discussed.

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KEYWORDS:

Bernard Bolzano;
eighteenth-century
aesthetics; nineteenth-
century aesthetics; analytic
aesthetics

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Hlobil, Tomáš. 'On Some Pitfalls of the English Edition and Translation of Bolzano's Aesthetic Treatises.' *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* LXI/XVII, no. 2 (2024): pp. 176–188. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.442>

Dominic McIver Lopes, professor of philosophy at the University of British Columbia, has edited the English translations of 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts' (1849)¹ and the core part of 'On the Concept of the Beautiful' (1843)² by Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848), publishing them under the title *Essays on Beauty and the Arts*.³ Introducing today's students to two complex and complicated German philosophical texts, written more than 170 years ago in Prague, then part of the Austrian monarchy, is a difficult task, since one cannot count on knowledge of the sociopolitical situation at the time, or on a thorough familiarity with German aesthetics and philosophy, and certainly not on a sufficient knowledge of German. (I speak from personal experience teaching Bolzano's aesthetics at Czech universities.)

The editor has met the high scholarly demands of both treatises with an extensive supporting apparatus. He has equipped the book with a preface, notes, a glossary of selected terms compiled by the translator, Adam Bresnahan, a note to instructors on how to work with Bolzano's texts and in what courses, an introduction, a list of key explications, references, illustrations, footnotes to selected places in the translation, and an index of names and important terms. In the preface, Lopes provides a brief biography of Bernard Bolzano, including a sketch of political and university conditions in pre-March Austria. He introduces Bolzano as an Enlightenment social reformer and characterizes the reception of Bolzano's philosophy by its solitary position in the German philosophy of the first half of the nineteenth century, dominated by idealism, and its gradual rediscovery by twentieth-century philosophers who presented Bolzano as a precursor of analytic philosophy and analytic aesthetics. He briefly summarizes the main literature on Bolzano's aesthetics published in English (Peter McCormick, Paisley Livingston, Paul Rusnock, and Jan Šebestík). From the extensive literature written by Austrian authors, important for the interpretation of Bolzano's aesthetics, he limits himself only to the English study by Maria Reicher.⁴

1 Bernard Bolzano, 'Über die Eintheilung der schönen Künste: Eine ästhetische Abhandlung', in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. IIA/13, *Ästhetische Schriften*, ed. Jan Berg (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2021), 79–142.

2 Bernard Bolzano, 'Über den Begriff des Schönen: Eine philosophische Abhandlung', in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. I/18, *Mathematisch-physikalische und philosophische Schriften 1842–1843*, ed. Gottfried Gabriel, Matthias Gatzemeier, and Friedrich Kambartel (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1989), 95–217.

3 Bernard Bolzano, *Essays on Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Dominic McIver Lopes, trans. Adam Bresnahan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2023).

4 Maria E. Reicher, 'Austrian Aesthetics', in *The Austrian Contribution to Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Mark Textor (London: Routledge, 2006), 294–307. Other important Austrian studies on Bolzano's aesthetics include Christoph Landerer, 'Bernard Bolzano, Eduard Hanslick und die Geschichte des musikästhetischen Objektivismus', *Kriterion* 5 (1993): 16–30; *Eduard Hanslick und Bernard Bolzano: Ästhetisches Denken in Österreich in der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Sankt Augustin: Academia, 2004); 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 Bolzanos geistiges 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 (1914–1999)*, ed. Martin Seiler and Friedrich Stadler (Vienna: öbv, 2000), 227–48; 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.

The equally important German⁵ and Czech⁶ literature is not mentioned at all. Lopes points out the late appearance of translations of Bolzano's aesthetic treatises into English (the treatise on beauty was published in this journal, the treatise on the fine arts only in the present edition) and into French.⁷ He also draws attention to the fact that both treatises have been omitted by the main English aesthetics handbooks, Michael Kelly's *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* and Paul Guyer's *History of Modern Aesthetics*.⁸ He finds this situation unseemly, since 'Bolzano is far closer to the mainstream of contemporary aesthetics than any philosopher of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries' (p. xv). For Lopes, Bolzano is consistent with the psychological and cognitive anchoring of present aesthetics, as well as with its focus on aesthetic culture or artistic media. In the conclusion to the preface, Lopes expresses the wish that analytic aesthetics should examine not only Immanuel Kant and David Hume but also Bolzano as a defining historical figure who called for a search for the role 'that beauty and the arts can play in the long struggle for a better future for us all' (p. xvi).

Lopes continues his detailed exposition of Bolzano's aesthetics in the extensive introduction (pp. 1–33). In the first part, 'Context', he proceeds from the claim that Bolzano's aesthetic treatises do not raise new questions but rather answer questions raised in the previous period in a new way. He illustrates the antecedence of the questions with two classic authorities for an English-speaking audience, Paul Oskar Kristeller and M. H. Abrams. In his study 'The Modern System of the Arts', Kristeller shows that the group of human activities known as the fine arts crystallized in Europe between 1728 and 1751, along with other groups such as the humanities, the practical arts, and the sciences.⁹ Abrams, in his study 'Art-as-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics', emphasizes the great speed of the emergence of the concept of autonomous fine arts.¹⁰ He explains it by the creation of a middle-class culture that finds pleasure in poetry, music, painting, and architecture. The middle class caused

5 German authors have interpreted Bolzano's theory of beauty as anticipating reception aesthetics as well as Peircean and Ecoean abduction: Dietfried Gerhardus, 'Einleitung des Herausgebers: Bolzanos methodische Grundlegung einer rezeptionstheoretisch aufgebauten Ästhetik', in *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, by Bernard Bolzano, ed. Dietfried Gerhardus (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972), ix–xxxvi; Dietfried Gerhardus and Matthias Gatzemeier, 'Ästhetisch/Ästhetik', in *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, 2nd ed., ed. Jürgen Mittelstraß (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), 1: 257–58; Matthias Gatzemeier, 'Bernard Bolzanos Ästhetik und Kunsttheorie', in *Philosophie als Theorie der Rationalität: Analysen und Rekonstruktionen*, ed. Jürgen Villers (Würzburg: Königshausen, 2005), 530–40.

6 The tradition of Bohemian interpretations of Bolzano's aesthetics, written in Czech and German, dates to the nineteenth century. The most important titles are Emil Utitz, 'Bernard Bolzanos Ästhetik', *Deutsche Arbeit* 8 (1908/9): 89–94; Karel Svoboda, *Bolzanova estetika* [Bolzano's aesthetics] (Prague: ČSAV, 1954); Helena Lorenzová, 'Význam díla Bernarda Bolzana v dějinách estetiky' [The significance of Bernard Bolzano's work in the history of aesthetics], *Estetika* 23 (1986): 159–72, 212–25.

7 Bernard Bolzano, 'On the Concept of the Beautiful: A Philosophical Essay', trans. Adam Bresnahan, *Estetika* 52 (2015): 203–66; *Écrits esthétiques*, ed. Carole Maigné and Jan Sebestik, trans. Carole Maigné, Nicolas Rialland, and Jan Sebestik (Paris: Vrin, 2017).

8 Michael Kelly, ed., *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, 3 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

9 Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 496–527; 13 (1952): 17–46.

10 M. H. Abrams, 'Art-as-Such: The Sociology of Modern Aesthetics', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 38 (1985): 8–33.

considerations originally focused on the creator to be replaced by considerations focused on the recipient. In Abrams's words, 'the construction model' was replaced by 'the contemplation model' (Lopes calls it the 'consumption model'). Instead of questions directed at the specificity of individual kinds of fine art, general questions of taste and beauty came to the fore. Lopes supplements Kristeller's and Abrams's conclusions with references to the trees of knowledge in the encyclopaedias of Ephraim Chambers, Denis Diderot, and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert, and to the twenty-ninth issue of Joseph Addison's *Spectator* of 1711. The first example illustrates that the fine arts had by this time become a prominent part of knowledge, the second that they had ceased to be governed by the principles of the arts themselves, as their general laws and rules began to be derived from human taste.

The second part, 'Content: Beauty', introduces Bolzano's treatise 'On the Concept of the Beautiful'. Here Lopes starts from the distinction between thinking about art from artistic and aesthetic points of view. Using the example of listening to a Balinese gamelan orchestra and Bolzano's definition of the beautiful object, he shifts this distinction to a recipient position. He clarifies the three central concepts of Bolzano's definition: contemplation (*Betrachtung*), awareness (*Anschauung*), and pleasure (*Vergnügen*, *Wohlgefallen*). He brings the first two concepts closer by further developing the Balinese example. The reception of a musical performance consists of its conceptual grasp and the awareness of this act. These cognitive acts can either be performed with the aim of arriving at clear and distinct representations (*Vorstellung*) and concepts (*Begriff*), as the music theorist aims to do, or they can be left in the position of obscure representations and concepts, as the ordinary listener does. The pleasure accompanying the obscure mode of cognition, according to Bolzano, stems from an awareness of the improvement of this specific cognitive skill.

Lopes devotes much attention to clarifying the attributes of clarity, distinctness, and obscurity used by Bolzano to distinguish different kinds of representations, concepts, and cognitions. He characterizes them in close relation to the intense discussion developed by the analytic interpretations of Bolzano's 'On the Concept of the Beautiful', which point out the different uses of the term *Anschauung* in the *Theory of Science* and in the aesthetic treatise. Whereas in the *Theory of Science* (§§ 72, 235, 280, 295–96) Bolzano associated *Anschauung* with supremely clear cognition, in 'On the Concept of the Beautiful' he assigned to it the attribute of darkness. Lopes brings a new dimension to the debate by highlighting the practical benefits of a dark mode of cognition in everyday life. The emphasis on practicality, already evident in the preface, becomes from this point on a defining aspect of his interpretation. Lopes draws attention to Bolzano's conclusion that beauty is a purely human affair, finding the human being to be not only a knower but above all an agent. The move towards practicality eventually leads Lopes (surprisingly, given Bolzano's opposition to the aestheticization of life and the privileging of aesthetics within philosophy)¹¹ to the almost pan-aesthetic conclusion that '[w]e are creatures who find beauty almost everywhere because we are, in our cognitive capacities, creatures whose practical agency is culturally located' (p. 14).

In the third part, 'Method', Lopes uses the example of the chemical composition of water to illustrate Bolzano's complicated methodology based on the distinction between subjective and objective representations, subjective and objective concepts,

11 See Bolzano's 'Über die Eintheilung der schönen Künste', § 5, 88–90, and *Was ist Philosophie?* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1849), 23–24.

and subjective and objective truths, and the verification of their correctness by experience, especially by a thorough introspection of one's own consciousness. He calls for Bolzano's explication of the beautiful to become part of today's aesthetic discourse.

The fourth part, 'Content: The Fine Arts', introduces Bolzano's treatise 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts'. As with the previous treatise, Lopes begins this chapter with an appeal not to miss its high inventiveness. Again, he places great emphasis on the practical dimension of Bolzano's aesthetic considerations, and again stretches Bolzano's conception of the fine arts into a pan-aesthetic position: for Bolzano, the fine arts extend not only to processions and fireworks but also to the sciences and even thought and life itself. In Lopes's interpretation, according to Bolzano, there is virtually no art, indeed no human activity, that cannot be associated with beauty. To fail to recognize the role of the beautiful in human life is 'to overlook how, in general, reasons to make beautiful are already contained in our purposes and the means to achieve them' (p. 23). Lopes claims that Bolzano's theory of the fine arts does not stifle imagination despite its systematic nature. On the contrary, Bolzano anticipates numerous arts that did not exist in his time: film, kinetic sculptures, light installations, and especially abstract painting, including paintings made up of monochromatic surfaces. In Lopes's view, Bolzano's two aesthetic treatises, as a result of his extensionally broad conception of beauty, reconcile Abrams's two models into a harmonious concert. To achieve this, Bolzano, unlike his contemporaries, breaks down the boundaries between autonomous fine arts on the one hand and science and practical action on the other. Bolzano professes the practicality, diversity, and humanity of art and beauty. According to Lopes, the final question before us is whether we share the same commitments (p. 24).

For the introduction, Lopes includes 'Appendix: Bolzano on Kant and Post-Kantian Aesthetics'. In this he describes the course of Bolzano's struggle with Kant's *Critiques*. The coinciding terminology suggests that his aesthetic treatises were influenced by the *Critique of Judgement*. However, Lopes asserts that a thorough reading of them reveals that the correspondence between their texts is only superficial, since Bolzano challenges the main pillars of Kant's theory of the judgement of taste. Lopes introduces Kant's theory in a separate section of the 'Appendix', to follow it up with a summary of Bolzano's critical commentary (§§ 37–39[a]), presented in the untranslated quasihistorical¹² part of 'On the Concept of the Beautiful' (§§ 26–57). Bolzano's main criticism of Kant's theory attacks the non-conceptuality of the judgement of taste, including the non-conceptuality of contemplation (*Betrachtung*).¹³ Similarly, in 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts', Bolzano rejects (this time without reference to the *Critique of Judgement*) two pillars of Kant's theory of art – aesthetic ideas as conceptually ungraspable entities and the associated concept of genius. As Lopes points out, in contrast to Kant, Bolzano extends the concept of the fine arts to various areas of practical life. He advocates a conception of art tied to conceptually

12 The part of 'On the Concept of the Beautiful' in which Bolzano comes to terms with his predecessors' definitions of beauty is not easy to characterize precisely. It is not a purely historiographical survey. It is not placed, as is usual, at the beginning of the treatise, nor is it dominated solely by the chronological principle. Its aim was to show that his own definition of the concept of the beautiful is more pregnant than all earlier definitions.

13 For Kant's and Bolzano's 'Betrachtung', see Tomáš Hlobil, 'Bolzanova revize Kantova pojetí Betrachtung ve světle o předmět soudu vkusu' [Bolzano's revision of Kant's concept of Betrachtung in the dispute over the object of the judgement of taste], *Reflexe* 64 (2023): 5–30.

anchored beauty and does not reject the possibility of creating a theory of the fine arts as well. 'By challenging a line of thought anchored in Kant,' concludes Lopes, 'Bolzano charts an alternative to mainstream nineteenth-century aesthetics.'

COMMENTARY

Lopes decides to bring Bolzano's aesthetic treatises to students through pointing out their contribution to practical life and through the interpretation set forth by two classic American historiographical authorities. The chosen approach is from a pedagogical perspective fully understandable and useful. At the same time, however, it should be emphasized that Bolzano's aesthetic treatises were not popularizing but scholarly texts, as their subtitles, 'Abhandlung', indicate.¹⁴ Any 'translation' of these highly theoretical abstract texts into a more accessible form cannot therefore be taken for granted. The chosen approach, though thoroughly thought-out and carefully executed as in the case of the present book, rips Bolzano's aesthetics from its roots, from German aesthetics (and German philosophy more generally) of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. Without a comprehensive consideration of this tradition, in my view, Bolzano's aesthetic treatises cannot be properly understood and adequately interpreted.

Let me mention some examples illustrating the need for the required contextualization. Bolzano's theory of the beautiful, as Achim Vesper has shown, is both a theory of pleasure and cognitive theory.¹⁵ The starting point of the beautiful is the pleasure given by the beautiful object, tied to a specific way of cognition and arising from the awareness of this cognitive skill. This conception responds to two central lines of eighteenth-century German aesthetics. Simply put, the first, cognitive line is represented by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and all aestheticians characterizing beauty and fine arts by means of the Leibnizian-Wolffian distinction between different kinds of ideas (*Ideen*, *Vorstellungen*) and cognitions (*Erkenntnis*) designated by the attributes of clarity, distinctness, and obscurity. This line conditions beauty most often by clear, indistinct ideas brought to vividness, to perfection. Kant's *Critique of Judgement* represents the beginning of the second, subsequently predominant line. Kant refuses to tie beauty (judgement of taste) to a specific kind of idea. He conditions the judgement of taste by relating the idea, whatever it may be, to the subject or, more precisely, to the subject's feeling of pleasure. To ensure the possibility of an intersubjective agreement between judgements of taste despite the subjectivity of the feeling of pleasure as a starting point of beauty, he also anchors pleasure in a cognitive act. This cognitive act, however, is not based on a specific kind of idea of the object but on an awareness of the principle on which our cognitive powers operate, on an awareness of the harmony of imagination and understanding in their free play.

14 In the case of scholarly texts, Bolzano distinguishes between *Lehrbuch* and *Abhandlung*. He understood the *Lehrbuch* as a summary of all the truths of a particular science, the *Abhandlung* as an exposition of its partial truths. See Bernard Bolzano, *Wissenschaftslehre: Versuch einer ausführlichen und größtentheils neuen Darstellung der Logik mit steter Rücksicht auf deren bisherige Bearbeiter*, vol. 4 (Sulzbach: Seidel, 1837), § 393, 3–15. Overall, Bolzano always takes the addressee into account when writing his works. See Bernard Bolzano, 'Vorrede des Verfassers', in *Erbauungsreden an die akademische Jugend*, 2nd ed. (Sulzbach: Seidel, 1839), viii–xvi.

15 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, Stephan Pabst, and Achim Vesper (Würzburg: Königshausen, 2009), 103–18.

Bolzano tries to reconcile the two lines on the basis of his own theory of knowledge. He preserves the object as a full part of his theory of beauty. He calls for an investigation of what the beautiful object is, of the concept of the beautiful object. He upholds the Leibnizian–Wolffian attributes of clarity, distinctness, and obscurity of ideas and cognitions to describe the beautiful object but instils them with a new content and with a different function in the characterization of beauty. At the same time, Bolzano insists on pleasure as a defining starting point of beauty, but, unlike Kant, he does not separate it from the sensually agreeable (*das Angenehme*) and charming (*Reiz*). Given these circumstances, an adequate treatment of the nature of Bolzano's aesthetics cannot do without a thorough description of his permanent equilibristic work with concepts consistently used already by his predecessors.

Even Bolzano's originality cannot be adequately grasped without taking into account the context of German aesthetics. Like others, Lopes stresses the originality of Bolzano's extension of the concept of the fine arts to numerous activities with which the term is not normally associated today (fireworks, processions, daguerreotypes, and so on). A cursory glance at Wilhelm Traugott Krug's *Versuch einer systematischen Enzyklopädie der schönen Künste* shows that the Leipzig professor of philosophy (referenced by Bolzano) speaks of the same activities as Bolzano, although he does not always classify them as beautiful, since he draws on Kant's separation of the beautiful (*schön*) and the agreeable (*angenehm*). Nor does the Kantian viewpoint, however, prevent him from including other surprising activities (not mentioned by Bolzano), such as beautiful fencing (*Fechtkunst*) or beautiful horsemanship (*Reitkunst*), among the fine arts.¹⁶ The broad thematization of the fine arts can be found in other numerous German contemporary textbooks on aesthetics. To ascertain the originality of Bolzano's approach would require comparison with them.

Part of Lopes's pan-aesthetic interpretation of Bolzano's aesthetic theory includes remarks appreciating his thinking about the possibilities of presenting scientific procedures and conclusions in a beautiful manner: 'Mathematics, the sciences, and philosophy can be practiced as fine arts, as can any human enterprise where value is added by inviting contemplation that produces pleasure because some learning is happening' (pp. 31–32). At one point Lopes even makes the radical conclusion that for Bolzano 'philosophical writing [...] is indeed a fine art' (p. 20). Lopes takes this moment as further evidence of the difference between Kant's narrow and Bolzano's new broad conception of the fine arts (p. 31). In fact, Bolzano does not consider that philosophy, mathematics, and the natural sciences are fine arts, or even that they are arts at all.¹⁷ He is only thinking of ways to present (today we would say popularize) science through beautiful presentation. But such thoughts are – again – not original. The degree of their originality cannot be ascertained without placing them in the context of the long-developed and content-complex theory of the beautiful sciences (*schöne Wissenschaften*), which had a strong position at Prague University thanks to Bolzano's philosophy teacher, Carl Heinrich Seibt. In his inaugural lecture, Seibt reflects on the influence of the beautiful sciences on the education of reason (*Verstand*) and on their indispensability for the so-called higher sciences. Only the beautiful sciences can in

16 Wilhelm Traugott Krug, *Versuch einer systematischen Enzyklopädie der schönen Künste* (Leipzig: Hempel, 1802), 8–11, 203–8.

17 Bolzano, *Wissenschaftslehre*, § 393, 2. Anmerkung, 14–15.

his view establish the usefulness of the higher sciences by making them graceful.¹⁸ A comparison of Bolzano's reasoning with Kant is no less desirable. Although Kant explicitly rejects the concept of a beautiful science in the *Critique of Judgement* (§ 44), in his repeatedly held lectures on logic (see, for example, the so-called *Jäsche-Logik*) he developed reflections on the aesthetic perfection of cognition touching on the same issues that Bolzano would put forward. Moreover, it was these uncritical reflections of Kant that met with considerable acclaim at Austrian universities to the extent that they entered the philosophy textbooks.¹⁹

An even more flagrant case of the lack of contextualization is the veneration of Bolzano as a thinker who, in Lopes's words, 'correctly bet that we would one day have abstract painting' and who 'even more remarkably [...] foresaw that abstract paintings made up of uniform fields of colour could not succeed unless they also evoked some intellectual content' (p. 23; other scholars have used similar characterizations).²⁰ While such updates are attractive, they have, nevertheless, no direct support in Bolzano's texts. Bolzano does not allow mere colour or a sequence of mere colours to achieve the same high degrees of beauty and artistry that he attributes to the (re)presenting (*darstellend*) optical artworks. He doubts whether the mere colour is beautiful and still more whether it is a true work of art ('On the Concept of the Beautiful', § 19; 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts', § 29). Only the presence of *Darstellung* allows optical arts to fulfil higher purposes (in conjunction with poetry – *Dichtung* – even the highest, moral, and religious purposes) and thus become true works of art. Bolzano does not include observations on monochromy, the autonomy of colours and shapes (*Gestalt*), the primacy of colour over shape and object, or the connection of monochromy with the sublime in his reflections on painting. Interpretations that present Bolzano as a modernist anticipating 'non-denotative' (Gerhardus) painting of the twentieth century contradict his conception of painting. By the non-denotative turn, he would weaken the painting, depriving it of its most valuable purpose – to (re)present (*darstellen*). Bolzano liberates not the colour of the painting but colour as an independent optical phenomenon not yet involved in the artistic (re)presentation (*Darstellung*).

Removing Bolzano's modernist aura of an early theoretician of non-figurative painting does not mean denying his originality. It simply needs to be situated elsewhere. Bolzano, inspired by contemporary conclusions from optics, the physiology of vision, and the theory of colours (*Farbenlehre*), expands the initial perspective on how to properly classify the visual arts by incorporating them into the broad concept of the optical arts. By expanding towards the non-(re)presenting (*nichtdarstellend*)

18 Carl Heinrich Seibt, *Von dem Einflusse der schönen Wissenschaften auf die Ausbildung des Verstandes; und folglich von der Nothwendigkeit, sie mit den höhern und andern Wissenschaften zu verbinden* (Prague: Clauser, 1764). See also Tomáš Hlobil, *Geschmacksbildung im Nationalinteresse: Die Anfänge der Prager Universitätsästhetik im mitteleuropäischen Kulturraum 1763–1805* (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2012).

19 Tomáš Hlobil, *Franz Ficker (1782–1849): Österreichische Ästhetik unter Staatsaufsicht vor dem Herbartianismus* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2020), 247–77.

20 Dietfried Gerhardus, 'Bolzanos Theorie der Kunst unterwegs zur Praxis der Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert', in *Sprachphilosophie / Philosophy of Language / La philosophie du langage*, vol. 2, ed. Marcelo Dascal, Dietfried Gerhardus, Kuno Lorenz, and Georg Meggle (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 1577–84; Helena Lorencová, 'Music for the Eyes: Bolzano's Theory of the Fine Arts', *Umění* 44 (1996): 514–19; 'Bolzanos Vision der Zukunft der bildenden Kunst', in *Aesthetics for the Future: Fourth International Conference on Aesthetics Cracow 1996* (Kraków: Cracow University Press, 1997), 114–23.

optical arts and by measuring colours and shapes by criteria of beauty and artistry, he makes the investigation of colours and shapes a fully fledged aesthetic and art-theoretical topic, unwittingly anticipating their later ennoblement in painting practice. Bolzano himself, however, would never have supported the autonomous use of colour and shape in painting, as shown by his hierarchical conception of beauty and artistry, as well as by his privileging of *Darstellung*.²¹

These examples are perhaps sufficient to make it clear that updating interpretations of Bolzano's aesthetic treatises based historically on a highly selective approach (taking into account among German aestheticians only the Kant of the third *Critique*) can indeed make them more accessible to a wider readership. The extent to which such interpretations will acquaint them with the actual content of the treatises, including their internal conceptual tensions dependent on contemporary aesthetic and philosophical disputes, remains, however, questionable.

TRANSLATION

The translator, Adam Bresnahan, faced a difficult task for many reasons (linguistic and factual). He has produced a lucid and readable translation, in fact more readable than the original. But supposing that the book could be picked up not only by students but also by professional scholars (given the widespread use of English and the retreat of German, even by those for whom English is not their mother tongue), I take the liberty of pointing out some conceptual discrepancies between the translation and the original, in order to make it clear that even now it will not be possible to do without the German originals. To this end, I will analyse the key point of the treatise 'On the Concept of the Beautiful', subsequently developed also in the treatise 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts' – Bolzano's definition of the beautiful.

According to Lopes, Bolzano formulates the definition in § 11, then (precisely in § 14) he is to repeat it 'word for word' (p. 8). Both versions of the definition read as follows in the original:

§ 11

Das Schöne muss nämlich ein Gegenstand sein, dessen Betrachtung allen in ihren Erkenntnisskräften gehörig entwickelten Menschen ein Wohlgefallen, und zwar aus dem Grunde gewähren kann, weil es ihnen nach Auffassung einiger seiner Beschaffenheiten weder zu leicht ist, noch auch die Mühe des deutlichen Denkens verursacht, einen Begriff von ihm zu bilden, der sie die übrigen, erst durch die fernere Betrachtung aufgefassten Beschaffenheiten errathen lässt, hiedurch aber ihnen die Fertigkeit ihrer Erkenntnisskräfte zu einer mindestens dunkeln Anschauung bringt.

§ 14

Erklären wir nämlich *den schönen Gegenstand als einen solchen*, dessen Betrachtung allen in ihren Erkenntnisskräften gehörig entwickelten Menschen ein Wohlgefallen und zwar aus dem Grunde zu gewähren *vermag*, weil es ihnen weder zu leicht ist, noch auch die Mühe des deutlichen Denkens verursacht, nach Auffassung einiger seiner Beschaffenheiten einen Begriff von ihm zu bilden, der sie die übrigen,

21 Tomáš Hlobil, 'Bernard Bolzano on Colours, Shapes, and Non-Figurative Painting', *Umění* 71 (2023): 347–54.

erst durch die fernere Betrachtung *wahrzunehmenden* Beschaffenheiten errathen lässt, hiedurch aber ihnen die Fertigkeit ihrer Erkenntnisskräfte zu einer mindestens dunkeln Anschauung bringt.²²

The quotes show that the two definitions are not identical. Leaving aside the change in the word order, which does not affect the content, and which cannot be observed in the English translation because of the different principle of sentence formation, Bolzano made three important changes. (1) In § 11 he made the definiendum from the beautiful and approached it as an object, which he further characterized; in § 14 he made the definiendum directly from the beautiful object. (2) In § 11 he asserted that the object can provide (*kann gewähren*) pleasure; in § 14 he made the mode of providing pleasure more precise by declaring that the object is able (has the ability) to provide (*vermag zu gewähren*) pleasure. (3) In § 11 he connected the guessing of the other properties of the beautiful object with further contemplation (*Betrachtung*) of its grasped (*aufgefasst*) properties; in § 14 the connection was with further contemplation of the properties to be perceived (*wahrzunehmend*).

All three changes are important for Bolzano's theory of beauty. The first two changes underline its object character. Despite the subjectivity naturally resulting from the anchoring of beauty in the feeling of pleasure and in a specific mode of cognition, Bolzano's theory of beauty permanently aspires also to objectivity. For Bolzano, the beautiful is a beautiful object that has the ability to provide pleasure. The third change reinforces Bolzano's emphasis on the processuality of the specific mode of cognition connected with the beautiful object. Whereas the term *aufgefasst* moves the process towards closedness, the term *wahrzunehmend* dynamizes it, fostering its ongoing character. All three changes fulfil the thesis expressed in the previous parts of the text, which, together with the placement of the two explications throughout the text, shows that the final version of Bolzano's definition of the beautiful is the version in § 14, not the version in § 11.

In the English translation, all three changes have been suppressed and both definitions have become the same:

§ 11

The beautiful must be an object whose contemplation *can cause* pleasure in all people whose cognitive powers are duly 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 and does not occasion the rigor of distinct thought. Moreover, *the pleasure occurs* because the concept thus formed, in making it possible to guess at those qualities of the object *only accessible* to further contemplation, affords at least an obscure awareness of the proficiency of one's cognitive powers.

§ 14

Let us recall our explication of the beautiful as an object whose contemplation can cause pleasure in all people whose cognitive powers are duly 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 and does not occasion the rigor of

22 Italics are mine.

distinct thought. Moreover, the pleasure occurs because the concept thus formed, in making it possible to guess at those qualities of the object only accessible to further contemplation, affords at least an obscure awareness of the proficiency of one's cognitive powers.

Aufgefasst and *wahrzunehmen* are translated neutrally as 'accessible' in both versions. In § 14, the definiendum is changed by repeating the definiendum from § 11. Moreover, the object character of Bolzano's theory of the beautiful is weakened by the fact that the verb *gewähren*, which is strongly tied to the action of the beautiful object as the initial agens, is replaced first by the distinctly neutral 'cause' and in later parts of the definition even by the unacceptably passive 'occur'. Let us stop at the use of the verb 'occur', since its choice is the result of a misunderstanding of the construction of the entire definition. Bolzano's definition consists of one long, elaborately constructed sentence. This sentence cannot be translated into English as a whole; it has to be divided into separate sentences. Such a division is not easy; it requires, among other things, the correct identification of the subjects of the individual sentences. In the English translation, pleasure has been chosen as the subject of the second and third sentences, translating the German *Wohlgefallen*. In the original, however, the subject is not pleasure but 'the beautiful object which is able (has the ability) to provide pleasure', or precisely 'such an object which is able (has the ability) to provide pleasure on the basis of contemplation to all people whose cognitive powers are duly developed because [...]'. The misidentification of the subject of both sentences is important in relation to the original. Of all described deviations, it weakens Bolzano's realistic, object-oriented conception of the beautiful most significantly, while hegemonizing the subjective pleasure. The deepening of subjectivization is, however, inappropriate for Bolzano, since he was convinced that: 'Auch wenn es auf dem ganzen Erdenrunde nur einen einzigen Menschen, oder auch gar keinen gäbe, [...] bliebe doch das Schöne schön und das Garstige garstig.'²³

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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23 Bernard Bolzano, 'Über den Begriff des Schönen', § 39a, 177: 'Even if there were only one person on the whole earth, or even none at all, [...] the beautiful would remain beautiful and the ugly ugly.'

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
 Hlobil, Tomáš. 'On Some Pitfalls of the English Edition and Translation of Bolzano's Aesthetic Treatises.' *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* LXI/XVII, no. 2 (2024): pp.176–188. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/eeja.442>

Submitted: 08 August 2023
 Accepted: 05 September 2023
 Published: 12 September 2024

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Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press in cooperation with the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague.