



Six Encounters with Bolzano's Aesthetics

SYMPOSIUM

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ABSTRACT

The symposium comprises six short reflections on Bernard Bolzano's essays in aesthetics. James Shelley and Mohan Matthen treat the theories of beauty and the arts in their own terms, Jennifer Judkins approaches Bolzano from the perspective of musical performance practice, and Claire Kirwin, Katalin Makkai, and Sandra Shapshay put Bolzano in dialogue with Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

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The appearance in English of Bernard Bolzano's essays 'On the Concept of the Beautiful' and 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts' coincides with an explosion of philosophical work on aesthetic value or beauty.¹ Bolzano's essays resonate with the interests of philosophers who seek to understand aesthetic value as it is realized beyond the arts – in nature, design, everyday life, and ideas. Equally, his essays resonate with the interests of philosophers who wish to revive conceptions of the arts as homes to aesthetic value, in addition to other values. At the same time, many of those working on aesthetic value now doubt what has come to be called 'aesthetic hedonism', a family of views under which an item's aesthetic value is constituted by its capacity to provide experiences worth having for their own sakes. Bolzano is an aesthetic hedonist whose brand of hedonism is in some ways more promising than those about which doubts are commonly raised. For all these reasons, Bolzano should be at the centre of attention in Anglophone aesthetics.

To round out the recent translations of the primary sources, there is a growing secondary literature in English, which includes work by Tomáš Hlobil, Paisley Livingston, Paul Rusnock and Jan Šebestík, Dominic McIver Lopes, and Emine Hande Tuna.² This symposium collects six brief reflections that were presented at the 2023 meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics. James Shelley and Mohan Matthen treat the theories of beauty and the arts in their own terms, Jennifer Judkins approaches Bolzano from the perspective of musical performance practice, and Claire Kirwin, Katalin Makkai, and Sandra Shapshay put Bolzano in dialogue with Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Friedrich Nietzsche. All six essays demonstrate the richness of Bolzano's work for contemporary aesthetics.

1 Bernard Bolzano, 'On the Concept of the Beautiful', in *Essays on Beauty and the Arts*, ed. Dominic McIver Lopes, trans. Adam Bresnahan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2023), 35–80, hereafter: CB; 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts', in *Essays on Beauty*, 81–132, hereafter: CFA.

2 Tomáš Hlobil, 'Bernard Bolzano on the Picture, the Image and the Visual Depiction', *Umění* 72 (2024): 98–109; Paisley Livingston, 'Bolzano on Beauty', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54 (2014): 269–84; 'An Introduction to Bolzano's Essay on Beauty', *Estetika* 52 (2015): 203–28; 'Bolzano on Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 56 (2016): 333–45; Paul Rusnock and Jan Šebestík, *Bolzano, His Life and Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Dominic McIver Lopes, 'Introduction', in Bolzano, *Essays on Beauty and the Arts*, 1–24; 'Bolzano on Aesthetic Normativity', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 64 (2024): 143–56; Emine Hande Tuna, 'Bolzano's Aesthetic Cognitivism', *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 11 (2025): 413–30.

James Shelley

What is it for an object to be beautiful? Bernard Bolzano gives his answer to this question, which he refers to as his 'explication of the beautiful', in § 11 of 'On the Concept of the Beautiful':

[T]he 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.

This passage is pivotal. Everything Bolzano says before its occurrence he says in preparation for it. Everything he says after its occurrence he says in its defence. It is also puzzling. As rendered in Adam Bresnahan's helpful new English translation, each of its three sentences refers to the pleasure taken in the beautiful:

- (a) [T]he beautiful must be an object whose contemplation can cause *pleasure* in all people whose cognitive powers are duly developed.
- (b) 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.
- (c) 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.

What is puzzling is whether we should regard each sentence as referring to the same pleasure. Does a-pleasure = b-pleasure = c-pleasure? There is reason to think so. Otherwise sentence (b) would not introduce b-pleasure as *this* pleasure, the very pleasure referred to in sentence (a), and sentence (c) would not introduce c-pleasure as *the* pleasure, the very pleasure to which Bolzano has been referring all along. These facts support what we might call the one-pleasure reading of Bolzano's theory of beauty. There is also reason, however, to think that the passage is not referring to the same pleasure across all three sentences, and so support what we might call a two-pleasure reading. Consider, for starters, the occurrence of the word 'Moreover' at the beginning of sentence (c). This suggests that b-pleasure and c-pleasure each occur separately and that each has its own cause. How then could they be the same?

At this point, perhaps, some serious Bolzano scholar, one partial to the one-pleasure reading, will interject that the two-pleasure reading is an artefact of Bresnahan's translation. In the original, Bolzano's explication of the beautiful consists of a single tortuous sentence, not the three manageable ones labelled here as (a), (b), and (c). Bolzano's single sentence contains a single occurrence of the word 'pleasure' (*Wohlgefallen*), which refers unambiguously to one pleasure (*ein Wohlgefallen*). Bolzano's sentence, moreover, contains nothing at all corresponding to the English

‘moreover’, a word whose function, in the translation, is to recover a measure of the unity of Bolzano’s original sentence by connecting sentence (b) to sentence (c).

To such an objection I reply that support for a two-pleasure reading is no artefact of Bresnahan’s translation. In the original, as in the translation, Bolzano (a) identifies a beautiful object as one whose contemplation causes pleasure, which (b) arises in concept formation from the contemplation of properties available to cognition before conceptualization, and which (c) arises in concept confirmation from the contemplation of properties available to cognition only after a concept has been formed. Then there is what Bolzano says in § 10, just before he gives his explication in § 11. The aim of § 10 is to ‘uncover the source of our pleasure in the beautiful’, something Bolzano has been promising to do since § 6. He begins by identifying pleasure in the beautiful with what we have been calling b-pleasure, that is, pleasure in concept formation:

Our pleasure derives from the fact that the object gives our powers an occasion to contemplate it in a way that [forming a concept of it] is neither too easy nor too difficult for them. Such commensurability with our powers spurs their *growth*. We experience this growth of powers even when we are not distinctly conscious of it, simply feeling it with pleasure, and this feeling of pleasure is itself the pleasure that we take when contemplating the beautiful. (CB, § 10)

But he ultimately also identifies pleasure in the beautiful with what we have been calling c-pleasure, that is, pleasure in concept confirmation:

We put this concept’s adequacy to the test by continuing to contemplate the object. The correctness of our concept is proven [...] if our continued observation reveals that the features we had presumed to be there from the outset are indeed actual features of the object [...] At this moment, our cognitive powers are augmented, because the correctness of their method has been confirmed. Thus, it is no wonder that we experience a singular pleasure at the end of our contemplation. (CB, § 10)

Though I think these passages from § 10 render the two-pleasure reading irresistible, I also think they suggest a way of reconciling it with the one-pleasure reading. It seems clear, given the above, that Bolzano conceives of aesthetic contemplation as having a two-phase structure, which we might represent as follows:

Phase 1

- (i) We apprehend the object as having some collection of qualities, on the basis of which
- (ii) we form a concept of the object, hypothesizing qualities not yet apprehended, in a way that proves neither easy nor difficult, which
- (iii) spurs cognitive growth, which we experience as pleasure.

Phase 2

- (i) We apprehend the object as having the qualities hypothesized in Phase 1, on the basis of which
- (ii) we confirm the concept formed in Phase 1, which
- (iii) spurs cognitive growth, which we experience as pleasure.

These two phases exhibit a pleasing symmetry: each begins with the apprehension of a set of properties, the material on which the mind then performs a conceptual operation, which operation spurs the cognitive growth we experience as pleasure. The pleasure involved in each phase is rightly regarded as distinct from the other: each is temporally (and presumably phenomenologically) distinct, and each arises from a distinct conceptual operation performed on a distinct set of properties. Yet the two pleasures are also rightly regarded as one, since both stem from a single source in human psychology. Each is a case of the pleasure by which the mind becomes obscurely aware of the expansion of its own powers (CB, § 11). It is the pleasure, in other words, by which the mind simply feels its growth without becoming ‘distinctly conscious’ of it as such – unlike when it experiences its growth in intellectual pursuits such as working through a mathematical proof (CB, § 10). The two pleasures are also one in a looser sense. They are conceptually linked, standing one to another as hypothesis to confirmation, or perhaps as question to answer. Each is the pleasure it is only in relation to the other.

I have introduced a distinction between one- and two-pleasure readings of Bolzano’s explication of the beautiful. Are there instances in the literature of both? I think so. I take the readings of Paisley Livingston and of Paul Rusnock and Jan Šebestík to be one-pleasure; at least I find little evidence that these writers distinguish between pleasures in Bolzano’s explication.³ I take Dominic McIver Lopes’s reading, by contrast, to be straightforwardly two-pleasure.⁴ If the sketch of a reading I have offered here follows Lopes’s two-pleasure reading, it also attempts to push beyond it by explaining how Bolzano’s two pleasures are also one.

3 Livingston, ‘Bolzano on Beauty’, 272–73; ‘Introduction to Bolzano’s Essay’, 206–11; Rusnock and Šebestík, *Bolzano*, 559–64.

4 Lopes, ‘Introduction’, 11; ‘Bolzano on Aesthetic Normativity’, 145–46.

BOLZANO'S HEDONISM: ITS STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Lopes et al.

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94

Mohan Matthen

Bernard Bolzano's essay on beauty is a neglected work of great insight. It effectively modifies a familiar form of hedonism to address the question of the variability of taste – the fact that you and I value different works of art. It would have been strengthened (as we will see) by taking a more empirical approach to psychology. But, unfortunately, scientific psychology emerged only some decades after Bolzano wrote.

Let me begin with what I take to be Bolzano's most penetrating insight. He says that he is 'explicating' a 'concept in itself', a constituent of an 'objective proposition' (CB, § 1). 'As such,' he insists, 'we have no reason to speak of the concept's movement, of its gradual transition into another concept, of its sudden shift into its opposite, or anything of the sort' (ibid.). In short, 'beauty' means the same thing whenever it is uttered. Let us say, then, that a native of India finds a performance of Raga Kalyani beautiful today and a native of Europe found a performance of Puccini beautiful when it premiered. These musical forms are descriptively very different from one another and these two persons psychologically so. What the European finds marvellous about Puccini does not appeal to the Indian and the same in reverse for the Indian. According to Bolzano, however, the objectivity of the beauty concept implies that beauty is nonetheless the same concept in both contexts. This is a strong constraint. Assuming that neither individual is mistaken about beauty, it forces you to make beauty a relation – most plausibly, both the Indian and the European evaluate music in the light of their own culture. Neither individual is taking a capricious attitude; both follow their culture.

Bolzano claims that the common factor in the two appreciative judgements above is *response*. The Italian responds to his music the same way as the Indian to hers. This is not, of course, a novel suggestion. David Hume and Immanuel Kant would have agreed. But these two worthies did not – and did not want to – accommodate cultural difference. They assumed that aesthetic response is based on a generic form of response independent of culture – a simple attitude of 'liking' or give-me-more. This simple conception of pleasure admits individual differences but it cannot cope with culture-based differences of appreciation. In short, Hume and Kant cannot explain why a cultural group should, as a whole, have the same response to different objects. Indeed, they did not recognize the phenomenon at all. And, as a consequence, they asserted the superiority of European high art over all others – if Indians (or Scottish peasants) failed to enjoy it above everything else, it was a sign of their undeveloped aesthetic taste. The art produced by this undeveloped capacity was, to their minds anyway, inferior. According to them, the Indian errs twice: she loves the performance of Raga Kalyani; she does not love Puccini.

Bolzano takes a different approach, potentially a more inclusive one. He does this, first, by constructing an account of specifically aesthetic pleasure that focuses on the cognitive engagement between a cultured human and an object of appreciation. (Kant's notion of disinterested pleasure is specifically aesthetic, but it does not highlight this psychological attitude.) According to Bolzano, the aesthetic consumer engages with an artwork in a manner that recalls the scientist's engagement with natural phenomena. She subsumes it under a concept that predicts its hitherto unperceived features. Beauty is that property of a thing that causes the beholder to

enjoy how this act engages her cognitive capacities. This act of conceptualization is culture-specific; it 'demands training', he says (CB, § 13). This offers a neat account of cultural difference. To be able to predict the arc of a phrase in Carnatic music does not imply an equal capacity to conceptualize Puccini in the same way. Thus, Bolzano does not imply that there is a universal response that works for all cultures. His theory is, at least potentially, culturally embedded.

Does Bolzano actually believe in cultural embedding? Well, (1) he tends to treat the appreciation of natural and artificial things as not fundamentally different, and (2) he persists in the Christian European tendency to treat foreign cultures as undeveloped or 'savage' (CB, § 16). So there is some question of whether he intended his schema to be a template for cultural inclusiveness. Nevertheless, it has that potential. It enables analytic aesthetics to step away from the pernicious Eurocentrism of philosophers like Hume and Kant. The beautiful in India need not descriptively resemble what Europeans find beautiful; it need not be devaluated from the same cultural perspective.

Something else to sympathize with. Bolzano is an aesthetic hedonist who takes a somewhat novel approach to the difficulties that hedonism faces. The chief among these is the fungibility of pleasure – the *Ramayana* gives you pleasure but so does a cup of coffee. How then can pleasure be what makes the *Ramayana* beautiful? Additionally, the *Ramayana* contains painful scenes – Rama wrongfully banishes Sita, his wife, to the forest, and that is no fun – no fun for her, no fun for the reader. How could it be pleasure, then, that makes this a beautiful episode?

One response to these supposed difficulties is to disavow the beauty-pleasure equation – many philosophers today think that aesthetic appreciation has nothing to do with pleasure. Bolzano takes a different, and I think quite original, line. He accommodates them by appealing to his 'more precise account of the type of pleasure that we experience when contemplating a beautiful object' (CB, § 4). This is a device that, as it seems to me, contemporary critics of hedonism overlook. They assume that, since the generic 'I like it' pleasure response is detachable from the object being contemplated, aesthetic pleasure must be detachable too. Thus, they argue that the displeasure that Sita's banishment evokes in us would render the *Ramayana* less beautiful. But the kind of pleasure Bolzano specifies allows him to escape from this annoying dialectic.

So far, I very much agree. But now I get to some weaknesses of his account.

Bolzano account of beauty goes like this: when we apprehend an object, we try to form a concept of it that will predict attributes that we have not as yet apprehended. This cognitive effort is the source of the pleasure we take in the beautiful. If this task were too easy, there would be little or nothing to give us pleasure; if it were too hard, it would be frustrating.

Now, Bolzano's account is somewhat similar to the Toronto psychologist Daniel Berlyne's 'inverted U'.⁵ Like Bolzano before him, Berlyne held that the beautiful is moderately complex because simple things give no processing pleasure, while highly complex things afford no fluency of processing. Unlike Bolzano's view, however, Berlyne's is empirically supported. Bolzano's direct arguments in favour of his position are by contrast quite jejune: the first rests on the bald assertion that 'there is no other conceivable explanation' and the second on the observation that perceptual skill increases pleasure – a consideration that could go either way with respect to his

5 David E. Berlyne, *Aesthetics and Psychobiology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971).

thesis, depending on where on the inverted U you are. (To be fair, he does supplement these arguments with some confirmatory considerations and replies to objections, some based on questionable assumptions.)

Clearly Bolzano's position could have been strengthened by empirical support. Unfortunately, though, empirical studies of psychological phenomena were still some decades in the future. In his day, it was acceptable to make assertions in this realm based purely on intuition and 'introspection'. Still: one *can* complain that at times his intuitions are extremely questionable. One small example is the claim that, among our senses, only sight and hearing 'are capable of bringing us representations of the beautiful' (CB, § 16.2). A bigger, indeed downright outrageous one is the assertion that animals and children cannot experience beauty. (Dominic McIver Lopes says in his Introduction that this proposition is 'peculiar and borderline offensive'.⁶)

Is there any evidence that supports this? I do not know but it is worth noting that aesthetic attitudes fall into a wider class of 'pointless' activities that animals and human infants undertake. Here is what Berlyne has to say about them:

Higher animals spend a substantial portion of their time and energy on activities for which terms like *curiosity* and *play* seem applicable [...] A hungry rat may spend time investigating a novel feature of the environment before settling down to eat. A bird may approach a strange and potentially threatening object at the risk of its life.⁷

The contemplation of beauty belongs to a family of activities undertaken to acquaint the subject with the nature and character of environmental objects with no apparent further adaptive point – curiosity, exploration, and play are other examples. Because he thinks that animals do not engage in them, Bolzano concludes that these activities – and the contemplation of beauty in particular – are rational/cognitive attitudes. I believe that this is mistaken. Elsewhere I have argued that aesthetic engagement is, rather, a form of perceptual play – an undirected exercise of perceptual faculties that evolution makes pleasurable because it encourages perceptual learning.⁸ If I am right about this, then animals are fully capable of the kind of engagement with perceptual objects that engenders aesthetic pleasure. The disagreement between Bolzano and myself can only be settled empirically. Unfortunately, psychology was not empirical in his day.

6 Lopes, 'Introduction', 12.

7 David E. Berlyne, *Conflict, Arousal, and Curiosity* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1960), 269.

8 Mohan Matthen, 'Play, Skill, and the Origins of Perceptual Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55 (2015): 173–97.

Jennifer Judkins

It is rare in the philosophy of the arts to find much discussion of musical practice and rehearsal, especially with regard to developing a final musical interpretation. Bernard Bolzano, however, finds that the pleasure gained in exercising our cognitive capacities in technical study, specifically in practice, is crucially joined to the beauty-making intentions that shape a performance. He also reminds us of the significant influence various means have on artists, each tool laden with its own particular history and guidance. This brief essay will consider his thoughts on the practice of practising music, and conclude with a glimpse at how musical instruments – the means – occasionally attain status as artworks themselves.

Bolzano specifies that, unless knowledge of ‘certain laws of the beautiful’ are applied ‘to augment the beauty of the sonic artwork’, even the greatest technical abilities cannot produce a work of fine art:

[T]he question is how much or how little room there is for the free, intentional activity of the performer in their execution of the piece. And also whether the rules before him (the partiture) and the instrument that he is to play (in the case of instrumental music) are such that he can perform some things as he pleases and can even, through his knowledge of certain laws of the beautiful, augment the beauty of the sonic artwork that he is performing. (CFA, § 23)

In other words, the practice room and the rehearsal hall are essential incubators: incubators for developing technique, and, interestingly, incubators for ‘augmenting’ the beauty of musical works. Musical instruments (and other artistic means) are not merely tools, Bolzano suggests. The instrument itself can have a substantial influence on a musician’s growth and progress.

Musicians spend so many more hours practising than performing. Can there be joy and beauty in it? For professional musicians, daily, structured, lengthy practising is a way of life. Like the Red Queen, musicians have to keep running just to stay in the same place, just to keep their ‘chops’. Hours and hours, day after day, years and years of instruction and repetition. Bolzano especially honours the importance of early studies in music. For beginners, the physical and cognitive challenges of music-making are immense. Although these sorts of difficulties lessen in favour of more artistic challenges in later life, they never evaporate. In fact, contemporary works are often extremely difficult to execute, requiring weeks of preparation. ‘Woodshedding’ a piece is hardly a rarified reverie but rather a continuous confrontation that only gradually allows one to first find and then interpret beauty. The joy is in that progression of learning, in becoming fluent enough to bring one’s own considered interpretation forward. As Miles Davis said, ‘sometimes you have to play a long time to be able to play like yourself’.

Bolzano emphasizes not only the aesthetics of learning but also the importance of quality instruction. He adjures us to consider how any artistic ‘insights and experiences’ were made habitual only through those ‘preliminary painstaking studies’ (CFA, § 4). Yet, even during this early training, the same larger mechanism is in effect: beauty is ‘at its core what we respond to in a process of learning, augmenting our

cognitive powers'.⁹ And beauty is what musicians are responding to as they work to shape interpretations against their own internal representations of the work.

Musicians adapt specific strategies of musical practice in order to perfect a performance of an internalized ideal. Interestingly, one often informs and transforms the other. The conception of the work shapes the practising, and practising transforms the conception of the work. The musical results of that evolving matchup are subjected to continuous critique both in the practice room and on stage. Unfortunately, enacting the meticulous adjudication needed to refine an interpretation can be a demanding, lonely business, and practice rooms are solitary places.

Bolzano was one of the first philosophers to point out the influence that various means have on an artist's practice. For musicians, instruments are not just tools; on his view they are extensions. They are amplifiers of musical intentions. Given his interest in the means of music, Bolzano would be delighted to see how instruments are now often displayed as artworks themselves in many major museums. Instruments with strong aesthetic qualities, such as gorgeous detail or decoration, are obvious candidates for display. Part of their beauty, though, and part of our attraction to these instruments, is imagining the joy of holding or striking them, even touching our lips to them, sending our breath through them.

Musical instruments displayed as artworks are almost always completely intact, unlike other objects. We might see a broken amphora, unrestored, presented for aesthetic consideration, but we do not usually see, for instance, a broken harpsichord leg or a trumpet bell. It seems that the ability to envision actually playing these instruments is important to their elevation as art objects. Of course, in other ways, instruments are not displayed in museums much differently from other decorated vessels. Those of a certain age and monetary value are more likely to be presented as artworks. However, as amazing as, say, the octopus Minoan jar is, it is still, ultimately, a jar. But a violin is, well, a violin. Gazing at instruments can be such a rich activity. We conceive of animating their beauty with sound and engaging those vibrations with our bodies. We can also conceive of bringing something personal ('free, intentional activity') to those musical sounds, adding a quality of expression that would 'amplify' the beauty of a musical work. Intriguingly, Bolzano actually claims that a performance is not really a work of fine art (and, further, 'the theory needed to perform it is not a genuine theory of art') without this personal, artistic augmentation (CFA, § 23).

And by the way, while we are at it, we should also bring beauty to our everyday actions: 'We rob ourselves of many joys of life when we too seldom think about how we could, with a little effort, make whatever we are doing much more beautiful and thus more enjoyable, both for ourselves and others' (CFA, § 5). Again, that effort takes practice.

9 Lopes, 'Introduction', 23.

Claire Kirwin

The absence of Bernard Bolzano's thought from almost all contemporary approaches to aesthetics is no doubt due in large part to the lack of engagement with his writings in the historical conversation that followed him. Unlike Immanuel Kant – a figure with whom he is clearly in dialogue – Bolzano's work was not taken up and subjected to critique within the ensuing German tradition. My aim in these remarks is to try to reveal some of Bolzano's relevance for contemporary thought by showing how it might be retrospectively integrated into that post-Kantian conversation. I shall do so by considering an objection Friedrich Nietzsche raises against Kant, and reflecting on how Bolzano's own thought might fare in relation to Nietzsche's challenge. My strategy, that is, is philosophical rather than strictly historical. Nonetheless, I think it has the potential to be illuminating. In particular, approaching Bolzano's work through the lens of Nietzsche's challenge helps to bring into view ways in which that work might have something new and interesting to offer to contemporary ways of thinking about the central questions of aesthetics.

'Kant, like all philosophers,' Nietzsche says, 'just considered art and beauty from the position of "spectator," instead of viewing the aesthetic problem through the experiences of the artist (the creator)'.¹⁰ As Nietzsche's final parenthetical gloss makes clear, his interest is in art as the product of a work of creation on the part of the artist, a bringing into being of something new. His thought is that we will miss something important about the nature of art if we consider it only from the position of spectator – a relatively passive perspective that approaches the art object as something given, encountered, already existing within the world.

Nietzsche is surely right to note the emphasis, within the Western tradition of philosophy of art, on questions concerning the spectator's reception of the art object. And this remains true in contemporary analytic aesthetics. We ask, for instance, about the nature of aesthetic experience or appreciation – where these mean the experiences of, and appreciation by, the spectator. Even more abstract metaphysical questions about, say, the ontology of art will typically proceed by taking as given the various instances and kinds of artwork that artists have thus far produced, asking what kind of model can adequately account for them. Of course, it is true that artists themselves are, as part of their own creative process, also spectators: they both look to other art objects to understand and shape their own ideas, and they assess their own work-in-progress from a spectatorial stance. But what Nietzsche's remark highlights is that the defining feature of the perspective of the artist, in their role as creator, is that from their point of view the artwork itself is precisely *not* 'given', 'encountered', 'experienced'. For it does not yet exist: the artist's central task is to bring it into being. Nietzsche's challenge is that, if we are really to understand the nature of art, we must also attend to this creative perspective.

In light of these reflections, it is striking that we find in Bolzano's work a deep interest in art conceived centrally as a work of creation on the part of the artist – a product of his 'free and intentional acts' (CFA, § 2). Indeed, he introduces his investigation in 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts' with the claim that '[t]he task for a *theory of art* is to state how the most diverse artworks can be produced with utmost perfection'

10 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), III.6.

(CFA, § 1); two sections later, he reiterates: 'A theory of art should tell us [...] *how* beautiful works of art come into being' (CFA, § 3; here and elsewhere, all emphases are Bolzano's). This aspect of Bolzano's approach thus appears to have the potential both to answer the Nietzschean challenge and to offer contemporary aesthetics something new and fruitful.

Bolzano's interest in the process of artistic creation leads to one of the more unusual features of his account. When we consider things from the spectatorial stance, we will naturally be inclined to think of the artwork as an object encountered within the external world, something accessible through the outer senses. We will think, then, of a concrete physical object, like a sculpture, or something audible, a piece of music, say. But Bolzano insists that although '[e]very work of art must be something real [...] it does not have to be an object that exists in *external reality*' (CFA, § 11). Although Bolzano goes on to count among arts of 'inner sense' more familiar categories of artwork, such as poetry, his initial development of the concept arises from some curious reflections on the initial stages of the artist's creative process, which involve, he thinks, the prior creation of an internal artwork that is private to the artist themselves. '[A]ll works of art that consist of an object in external reality,' Bolzano says, 'could never have been produced by their creator [...] if he had not first been able to develop a very detailed representation of the object in his mind' (CFA, § 12). Crucially, the internal model that the artist constructs is, according to Bolzano, 'already a work of art in itself'. And, although he acknowledges that 'we would not claim that [the artist's] entire art consists in the creation of an internal representation', still 'its creation is certainly a great, and in some cases indeed the greatest, part of his entire art' (ibid.).

This is, I think, a fascinating way of thinking about the nature of an artwork, and one that turns on its head the orthodox privileging of the role of the spectator that we saw Nietzsche criticize. On Bolzano's view, the art objects we encounter within the physical world really have a sort of double existence, each one paired with another work of art – the artist's internal model – the bringing into being of which constitutes a crucial part of the process of artistic creation, and in relation to which the external object exists as a sort of attempted approximation. To fully understand the nature of the physical object we encounter, we must understand this aspect of its existence. At the same time, the initial artwork, which the external object echoes, remains forever inaccessible to us as mere spectators; a genuine aesthetic encounter with this primary artwork is available only from the perspective of the artist.

Whether or not we are willing to accept Bolzano's story as an account of the nature of physical art objects, or of the process of artistic creation (among other worries, we may wonder, for instance, about a problematic regress arising), it certainly offers us an intriguing attempt to capture the significance, for our understanding of the nature of an artwork, of the role of the artist's creative process in bringing it into being. As such, Bolzano's approach offers something interesting and worth consideration within our contemporary thought about the nature of art.

I brought this aspect of Bolzano's account into view via reflection on Nietzsche's critique of Kant, and I have suggested that we find in Bolzano an interesting attempt to grapple with just this problem. At the end of the day, I do not think, however, that Nietzsche would be willing to accept the framework that Bolzano goes on to develop in the rest of the text. One does continue to see flashes of resonance between the two thinkers – compare, for instance, Bolzano's remark that '[i]n creating [the internal model], the artist even follows many rules with more or less distinct consciousness'

(CFA, § 12) to Nietzsche's assertion that at the moment of artistic creation the artist 'strictly and subtly [...] obeys thousands of laws'.¹¹ Nonetheless, at this very point of resonance, we also see a crucial difference emerge. For what Bolzano goes on to say is that the rule-following artist, 'if he is rational, [...] would be happy to find these rules correctly laid out and demonstrated in a theory of art' (CFA, § 12). Nietzsche, by contrast, insists that the 'thousands of laws' that the artist follows 'defy conceptualization'.¹² The key difference between the two concerns the question of whether there are aesthetic principles that can be articulated and systematized. Bolzano answers in the affirmative, and the central purpose of the text is to provide this articulation and systematization. Indeed, this aim is for Bolzano intimately connected to his interest in the perspective of the artist and the process of artistic creation, for 'there is no more important application of the tenets of the beautiful than teaching artists how they should work to produce art' of the best kind (CFA, § 1).

For Nietzsche, no attempt to systematize aesthetic principles can be successful. There can be no guidebook to teach the artist how to produce great art. This is because, for Nietzsche, truly great artists, like great individuals in general, must be 'new, unique, incomparable'; they do not work under the aegis of pre-existing general principles but rather 'give themselves laws'.¹³ Art, as seen from the perspective of the Nietzschean artist, must stand in an irreconcilable tension with any attempt to give a generalized theory of art, echoing the 'ancient quarrel' that Plato cites between artistry and philosophy.¹⁴ This aspect of Nietzsche's view can be understood as arising from his focus on the artistic perspective as, at its most fundamental, a creative one in a very strong sense: it is aimed at bringing into being something radically new.

By contrast, we find in Bolzano's theoretical approach something like an attempt to balance the creative perspective of the artist with an awareness of the continued significance of the art object's reception by an audience. The principles that Bolzano develops governing the production of the arts of external sense are structured and subdivided in terms of the sensory mode through which the artwork is to be perceived – that is, in terms of how it is to be received by the spectator. (Most fundamentally, there are arts for the ear, and arts for the eye; with this subdivision in place, Bolzano is able to go on to consider the various possible combinations of these two sensory modalities with each other and with the arts of thought.) And the approach is 'spectatorial' in another sense, too: in developing his classification, Bolzano looks first to those forms and instances of art that already exist, attempting to derive general principles from this pre-existing data, from artworks treated as given realities, and only then considering how the principles might extend to cover artworks that do not yet exist but (and here we shift back into the artist's creative perspective) that could be brought into being.

We might say that Bolzano's ideal artist, as compared to Nietzsche's, is more attentive to the ways in which the artwork they aim to bring into being in the external world is

11 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), § 188.

12 Ibid.

13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), § 335.

14 For more on this point of connection between Nietzsche and Plato, see Claire Kirwin, 'Beyond the Birth: Middle and Late Nietzsche on the Value of Tragedy', *Inquiry* 66 (2023): 1283–1306.

fundamentally an object for a spectator, and is more deeply responsive to the artistic tradition that precedes them. Nonetheless, the theory of art that Bolzano develops does not end up rigidly wedded to a pre-existing artistic canon (a complaint that Tolstoy, for instance, levels against many attempts to give a theory of art¹⁵), nor does it leave the artist reduced to producing merely derivative work. Bolzano's framework allows him to think beyond traditional instances of 'fine art', offering as examples of artworks such things as the spontaneous dancing of children. And the consideration of the question of what kinds of artwork could be brought into being in the future leads to one of the most interesting features of Bolzano's account, namely his apparent anticipation of new forms of art, such as moving pictures¹⁶ and cubism.¹⁷

In constructing this dialogue between Nietzsche and Bolzano, I have tried to bring into view a facet of the latter's work that might otherwise have been overlooked. And what this imagined conversation offers to contemporary aesthetics is, I think, an invitation: that we direct philosophical attention not only to the artwork considered as a completed object but also to the role of the artist in bringing it into being, and the nature of the process of artistic creation itself. It is worth, that is, reflecting on what art is, or might be, when viewed not only from the position of spectator but also from the perspective of the artist.

15 Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), 41–43.

16 See Livingston, 'Bolzano on Art'.

17 Rusnock and Šebestik, *Bolzano*, 587.

Bernard Bolzano's essay on beauty is structured as an analysis of the concept of the beautiful. Bolzano thus signals from the start that his path is not Immanuel Kant's, since it is a fundamental tenet of Kant's that 'beauty' is no concept.¹⁸ But it turns out that analysing the concept of the beautiful means, for Bolzano, investigating what is involved in experiencing something as beautiful. Bolzano thus appears to follow Kant in regarding the experience of beauty as the only way into a philosophical account of beauty. For Kant, the two claims are interwoven; Bolzano revitalizes one claim by reworking its relationship to the other. This is characteristic of Bolzano's engagement with Kant. Bolzano offers us a genuine alternative to Kant's aesthetics. But he offers more: a transformative appropriation of Kant's aesthetics that promises to tap its power while freeing it from its obscuring entanglements.

With Kant, Bolzano finds the experience of beauty to be distinctive: different from, if related to, other kinds of experience of things. To experience an object as beautiful is to engage in 'mere contemplation' of it. To contemplate the object is to attend to it guided by the question 'what is it?' or, equivalently, 'what is its concept?' In mere contemplation, you attend only to your representation of the object, setting aside various considerations, such as how the object might satisfy your needs.¹⁹ Such mere contemplation provides pleasure. There are other modes of pleasurable mere contemplation (CB, § 5). What sets the contemplation of a beautiful object apart is the source of its pleasure. This stems from the way in which you find success in your aim of conceptualizing the object.

To begin with, partial apprehension of the beautiful object is enough for you to form its concept: you only need to apprehend 'some' of its qualities (CB, § 11). Yet you do not arrive at the concept of the object by 'inferring' it from your partial apprehension thus far (CB, § 19). Rather, you guess what the object will turn out to be like, and your further contemplation shows your guess to be correct. Furthermore, you are able to guess its concept without much effort or strain. But not *too* easily and fluidly (CB, § 11): while the object does not frustrate your attempts to grasp it, it offers some attractive resistance, scope for engagement; it does not immediately disclose itself. Finally, your guessing does not require 'the rigor of distinct thought' (*ibid.*). That is, as with most of the thinking and representation that goes on in everyday life, you do it without having to be aware of doing it.²⁰ When, in the ordinary course of events, you reach for your cup of coffee and raise it to your lips, your representation of it as a cup of coffee is not normally something of which you are aware. Your arrival at the concept of the beautiful thing likewise does not require your self-aware thought. In Bolzano's terms, contemplation of the beautiful object is thinking 'by means of obscure representations' (CB, § 10). Altogether, you are able to enjoy 'at least an

18 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5:290.

19 See CB, § 3. Bolzano's conjuring of the scene includes intriguing details: 'In an hour when we are not bothered by any pressing needs, our eye (mental or physical) is confronted with an object the very representation of which catches our attention and invites us to further contemplation' (CB, § 10). But how does it catch our attention and issue this invitation? These are important aspects of the encounter with beauty, but Bolzano does not elaborate, and I am not sure that his account affords a ready explanation.

20 Lopes, 'Introduction', 10–11.

obscure awareness of the proficiency of [your] cognitive powers' (CB, § 11).²¹ In a tantalizing remark, which unfortunately remains undeveloped, Bolzano says that contemplation of beauty gives you at least 'an inkling' that you are 'augmenting' your 'ability to draw correct inferences by means of obscure representations', an ability that is important for 'everyday life' (CB, § 10).²²

Bolzano invites us to imagine reading the fable of 'The Wolf and the Lamb' for the first time.²³

After reading a few lines, we already have an idea of who the wolf and the lamb are supposed to represent, and we can guess how the story is going to turn out. Reading further, we find our conjectures confirmed. Similarly, we find that the new conjectures we developed while reading about the wolf's constant accusations are also confirmed. When we consider the entire story after having read it, we find that every single word served to further the author's purpose – namely, to express the lesson that we had anticipated the whole time and that was fully articulated at the end of the story. The fact that we are capable of anticipating the lesson while reading the story and understanding the lesson at the story's conclusion, and the fact that we are able to do so with ease and with such speed that we have no need of being distinctly conscious of all the individual thoughts involved, delights us by demonstrating the proficiency of our cognitive capacities. For this reason, we call the story beautiful. (CB, § 11)

One implication is that aesthetic guessing need not be once-and-for-all but may involve repeated guessing through which one builds up the concept of the object. The passage suggests further crucial, and related, nuances. The 'concept of the object' that is at stake is apparently not a 'general' concept, a concept that applies, in principle, to many objects.²⁴ While such concepts (fable, wolf, and so on) will no doubt be employed along the way, the concept that is arrived at in Bolzano's example registers that it is *this* fable, with *these* elements, building toward *this* lesson, which cannot be inferred from the lines you have read.²⁵ It is *the* concept of *this* object, and in capturing the object as the particular thing that it is, in all of its contingency

21 Guessing is not a stab in the dark but a deployment of cognitive skill. Bolzano offers little elaboration of what your cognitive powers are up to in guessing (but see CB, § 10). Bolzano contrasts guessing with inferring but does not make clear what each involves or just how they differ. By 'inference' Bolzano seems to mean something broader than logical inference: the gourmet 'infers the presence of other ingredients that have a *necessary* connection with those he has already tasted in the dish' (CB, § 19; Bolzano's emphasis).

22 Does he mean that contemplation of the beautiful allows you to become (obscurely) aware of, and take pleasure in, a proficiency on which you implicitly rely in everyday cognition? That would suggest that everyday cognition also involves guessing. But 'the ability to draw correct inferences by means of obscure representations' does not obviously involve or entail guessing. Bolzano's point remains murky.

23 The force of 'for the first time' is discussed below.

24 On 'general' concepts, see Lopes, 'Introduction', 9. Bolzano evidently rejects Kant's claim that concepts are inherently general. See Immanuel Kant, *The Jäsche Logic*, in *Lectures on Logic*, trans. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9:91.

25 So I understand Bolzano's claim that the concept sought and found in contemplation of the beautiful object is 'exhaustive' (CB, § 10) or 'contains the entirety of the object's features' (CB, § 7). I also take Bolzano to hold that the concept you form is not inferable from the basis you are going on; it could only be guessed. (The point is not merely that you happen to guess rather than infer it.) That is why it is, strictly speaking, 'only accessible to further contemplation' (CB, § 11).

and individuality, it must be as singular as the object itself. Bolzano thus seems to be referring to the *haecceitas* (or ‘thisness’) of an object.²⁶ The remark that ‘every single word serve[s] to further’ the ‘purpose’ that is the fable as a whole²⁷ suggests, moreover, the view that what makes an object beautiful is that all of its features are essential to the whole that it comprises. (To this extent, Bolzano concurs with the tradition that construes beauty as ‘unity in diversity’.²⁸) What makes an object beautiful is what makes it the particular thing that it is.²⁹

As we have seen, Bolzano says that the beautiful object pleases because it makes you (obscurely) aware of the proficiency of your cognitive powers. He takes a further step: your pleasure is in your ‘contemplation itself’ and not in the object, although you ‘project’ your pleasure onto the object (CB, § 10). This strikes me as a false choice. Bolzano precludes a more attractive alternative that (space permitting) I would argue to be open to him, namely that you are enjoying the way in which the object invites and sustains your engagement with it. In more Kantian language: the pleasure you find in a beautiful object stems from the object’s being such as to feel contingently ‘made for’ your mere contemplation of it.³⁰ The beauty of the fable (to return to his example) lies in its allowing you to guess, but not know, where it is going.

But Bolzano’s readers, then and now, are not, I assume, likely to feel fables or riddles (another of Bolzano’s examples) to be paradigmatic beautiful objects, and I wonder whether the plausibility they lend Bolzano’s account trades on their built-in ‘guess’ structure. A fable is shaped by the lesson toward which it builds; a riddle explicitly asks a question and invites us to anticipate its clever answer.³¹ Most beautiful objects are not structured in this way. It strikes me as implausible to hold that finding a painting (for example) to be beautiful involves looking at part of it (the bottom left corner? the colours but not the line?) and guessing how parts you have not yet seen will turn out to look.³²

Let me sketch an alternative account of the experience of beauty that I think makes better sense of our enjoyment of many beautiful objects. Imagine that you are looking at a beautiful object – a painting, say. You trace some features of the object. As you come across a new feature, you feel that it is ‘right’. This is what should be here and now. It works, it fits. You might find yourself thinking or saying, simply: ‘yes’. As in Bolzano’s account, your experience has an essentially temporal structure, since your sense that the new feature belongs here depends on what you were perceiving earlier. You are enjoying a feeling of ‘fit’ or ‘matching up’ between yourself and the object, as I claimed above Bolzano could and should say. On both accounts, you are

26 The term, which Bolzano does not use, apparently originates with Duns Scotus.

27 Although Bolzano mentions ‘the author’s purpose’, all he is committed to, I think, is the fable’s having or being a purpose, which all of its parts serve. See CB, p. 62.

28 Nevertheless, Bolzano rejects unity-in-diversity accounts in as-yet-untranslated parts of the essay. Thanks to an anonymous referee for this point.

29 That is why Bolzano treats the phrases ‘concept of the object’ and ‘concept of its beauty’ (CB, § 11) as interchangeable. See also CB, § 19.

30 For Kant, beauty is an object’s subjective purposiveness for our cognitive powers, its suitability for animating the mind. Nevertheless, Kant makes remarks similar to Bolzano’s about beauty not being in the object.

31 Bolzano’s example of a logarithmic spiral strikes me as somewhat different and as raising questions of its own that would require more space to address.

32 Although Bolzano briefly discusses beautiful paintings (CB, § 16.2), he does not specify what the guessing would consist of in their case.

discerning a kind of pattern, a way in which the object seems to ‘have to’ go. And in both cases the pattern is essentially contingent. The pattern you are getting the hang of as you go along is not inferable from anything you perceive or know about the object so far.

The alternative account sounds and is, up to a point, similar to Bolzano’s account. The two experiences might even be indiscernible: you might not be able to tell whether the experience you are having corresponds to the alternative I have sketched or to Bolzano’s account.³³ But they are not the same. Feeling that the new feature you are encountering ‘fits’ or is ‘right’ need not involve feeling that you knew it was coming or having discerned the larger pattern to which they belong. All it requires is the capacity to recognize its fittingness when you encounter it.

The ‘recognizing fittingness’ account also accommodates (what I take to be) a fact that Bolzano’s excludes. It is an implication of Bolzano’s account that an object’s power to afford pleasure in its mere contemplation – its beauty, in other words – diminishes as the object’s novelty wanes.³⁴ But surely it is possible to appreciate the beauty of an object once its features are no longer new to you. Indeed, the more you are acquainted with it, the deeper your appreciation of its beauty may grow.

What commitments lead Bolzano to prefer his ‘guessing’ account over a ‘recognizing fittingness’ account? Are those commitments warranted – or do they reflect Bolzano’s own obscuring entanglements? There is much to be learned, I think, from pondering these questions.

33 Pace Bolzano’s declaration that ‘intense introspection while contemplating a beautiful object’ will convince his readers of the correctness of his account (CB, § 11).

34 Bolzano’s phrasing is hedged: if an object is to allow ‘full enjoyment of the beautiful’ it must be in some way new to its contemplator (CB, § 16.3). But it is not evident what, if anything, partial (not ‘full’) enjoyment of the beautiful could amount to on Bolzano’s account. The hedging may reflect some hesitation on Bolzano’s part.

Sandra Shapshay

Why Bernard Bolzano and Arthur Schopenhauer? The reason for my comparison is that Bolzano's aesthetic theory represents another distinctive and interesting path that one could take from a basically Kantian starting place. What I would like to do in this brief essay is to sketch out what I see as these two theoretical paths – attending to their similarities and differences – before offering an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each.

First, the Kantian starting point. As is well known to readers of *Estetika*, Immanuel Kant understands the experience of beauty as inhering in the pleasurable, disinterested free play of the cognitive faculties (of the imagination and understanding) in response to purposive forms – paradigmatically in the natural world, but also in art. He underscores, however, the difference between cognitive judgements, for example 'this is a rose', and pure aesthetic judgements, like 'this rose is beautiful'; only the latter, he claims, involve no determinate concepts.

Enter our two Kantian aesthetic innovators: Bolzano (born in 1781) and Schopenhauer (born in 1788). Both were actively thinking and rethinking this Kantian story about beauty (and the beautiful arts) from about 1818 to the 1840s. They had little patience for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (and his ilk), seeing Hegelian prose as obscure to the point of obscurantism. They prized clarity and argumentative rigour (as far as is possible in this field of inquiry) and aimed to theorize the experience of beauty as well as to offer a principled classification of the arts.

Another striking similarity in their variations on a Kantian theme is that they both see the experience of beauty and of the fine arts as involving more cognitive content and learning than had Kant. Although they did not go all the way to the cognitivism of Hegel – who identified beauty with the perception in sensuous form of the highest truths and ideals of a culture – they did hold that there was some important learning going on in some degree or other in any experience of beauty.

Let me start with Schopenhauer's move toward greater cognitivism, as his was the earlier aesthetic theory, articulated fully in his *The World as Will and Representation*, Volume I of 1818.

The experience of beauty, for Schopenhauer, also known as 'pure contemplation' (*reine Kontemplation*) involves a will-less (disinterested) engagement with an object or environment, which consists in the subject perceiving it on its own terms and for its own sake.

Will-less (*willenlos*) perception – the subjective element of aesthetic experience – is a necessary correlate of the objective element of aesthetic experience – namely, the perception of Ideas, 'the original, unchanging forms and qualities of natural bodies, inorganic no less than organic, as well as the universal forces that manifest themselves according to natural laws'.³⁵ The aesthetic experience of music, especially what would later be termed 'absolute' music – non-programmatic music without a

35 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Christopher Janaway, Judith Norman, and Alistair Welchman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 191.

text – is a special case for Schopenhauer, bypassing perception of Ideas and offering a ‘copy’ or ‘expression’ of the ‘thing in itself’ or Will.

Pleasure (*das Wohlgefallen*) arises from both of ‘two inseparable components of the aesthetic way of looking at things’³⁶ and sometimes more from one than the other. Whereas the pleasure in Kant came from free play of the faculties, for Schopenhauer, the pleasure is now identified predominantly with the disinterestedness of the experience. Also there is more cognitive content to the experience of beauty: contemplation affords intuitive perception of the essential features of the world. But Schopenhauer sticks with Kant as seeing the experience of beauty as non-conceptual: there is insight on offer in aesthetic contemplation, for Schopenhauer, but those insights are intuitive rather than conceptual. And, in any translation from intuitive knowledge to conceptual or abstract knowledge, some content is always lost.

This is in contrast to Kant, where the pleasure in the beautiful comes from the free play of the cognitive faculties, not from the disinterestedness of the experience. And there is more cognitive content to the experience of beauty in Schopenhauer, for contemplation is not just a free exercise of the cognitive faculties but further affords a unique avenue for intuitive perception of the essential features of the world. Yet Schopenhauer sticks with Kant as seeing the experience of beauty as non-conceptual.

Bolzano, in contrast to both Kant and Schopenhauer, theorizes the cognitive content of beauty as conceptual.

For instance, he writes,

[t]he 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. (CB, § 11, emphasis mine)

The conceptual content of the experience of beauty is also at the root of the pleasure in the experience, for Bolzano, because the concept that is formed of the object in an experience of beauty affords us a rule by which we can ‘guess at those qualities of the object only accessible’ upon further contemplation, and this gives us an ‘obscure awareness’ of cognitive proficiency.

In sum, for Bolzano, aesthetic pleasure involves (1) cognition that is neither too easy (boring) nor too difficult (frustrating), and (2) awareness of the proficiency of one’s cognitive powers, and awareness of the proficiency of any of one’s powers, on his account, is pleasing. Thus, as Dominic McIver Lopes puts it in his Introduction, ‘[p]leasure in beauty [for Bolzano] accompanies concept acquisition’.³⁷ And Lopes helpfully contrasts this with Kant, writing that, ‘[w]hereas Kant holds judgments of taste to be non-conceptual yet universal and necessary, Bolzano argues that beauty responses are conceptual, not universal, contingent upon intellectual formation’.³⁸

36 Ibid., 219.

37 Lopes, ‘Introduction’, 13.

38 Ibid., 30. See also Livingston, ‘Bolzano on Beauty’, 272.

In sum, the experience of beauty for Bolzano, like Schopenhauer, involves a hedonic and a cognitive gain. But both are conceptual through and through.

Assuming I have sketched these two, distinct post-Kantian paths correctly, which path seems to be on the right track?

One strength of Bolzano's theory of beauty, it seems to me, is its anticipation of the 'perceptual fluency theory of beauty', which suggests that 'aesthetic experience [of beauty] is a function of the perceiver's processing dynamics: the more fluently the perceiver can process an object, the more positive is his or her aesthetic response'.³⁹ According to Rolf Reber, Norbert Schwarz, and Piotr Winkielman, high fluency provoking features in an object include symmetry, goodness of form, and figure-ground contrast, among other things.

Now what strikes me as an advantage of Bolzano's account of beauty over the fluency account is that he explicitly raises and answers a problem for the perceptual fluency theory of beauty. Would a very high degree of perceptual fluency (understood as 'the ease in identifying the physical identity of the stimulus'⁴⁰) not be experienced as boring or banal in its everyday familiarity? For Bolzano, beauty lies in the mean between too much and too little fluency. He writes that, 'on the one hand, there are objects that can be apprehended all too easily for them to deserve to be called beautiful' (CB, § 20). And others demand far too much exertion and that vex us when we try to 'apprehend the object's qualities and attempt to develop a concept of it, [for] we always find something that contradicts the concept we have formed of it' (CB, § 18). This an experience of ugliness. In explicating how too much fluency would be boring, Bolzano also deploys his account of beauty, albeit rather briefly, to shed light on beauty's opposite. The perceptually/cognitively vexing is one species of the ugly. The other is the sensorily or morally disgusting (CB, §§ 18, 37).⁴¹ In both cases, the object's features frustrate our attempts at subsuming it under a concept or rule, either because its features are too irregular or because it is repugnant to the subject.

So it seems that Bolzano's theory anticipates an objection and offers an answer to the fluency theory of beauty by offering a golden-mean version of it *avant la lettre*, as well as a *prima facie* compelling theory of ugliness to boot.

But there is something unsatisfying in Bolzano's theory of beauty that I think is better captured on the Schopenhauerian path, and that is the source of the pleasure in aesthetic contemplation.

For Bolzano, the source of the pleasure is a feeling of our cognitive prowess. This strikes me, phenomenologically speaking, as right for many invigorating experiences of artistic value, where the cognitive faculties are challenged.⁴² But this does not seem to capture the source of pleasure we receive, say, from the more relaxing experiences of beauty, say, in nature: the walk in the park, the hike in a forest, beholding a rose, taking in a lovely sunset on the pier. Or the experiences of simply being absorbed in

39 Rolf Reber, Norbert Schwarz, and Piotr Winkielman, 'Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure: Is Beauty in the Perceiver's Processing Experience?', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 8 (2004): 365. See also Livingston, 'Bolzano on Beauty'.

40 Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman, 'Processing Fluency and Aesthetic Pleasure', 366.

41 See also Livingston, 'Introduction', 212.

42 See also Elizabeth Schellekens's recent 'noetic conception of aesthetic experience' in 'Thinking the Aesthetic: Towards a Noetic Account of Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 82 (2024): 129–41.

an impressionist painting or carried along by a captivating Tchaikovsky melody. These sorts of pleasurable experiences of losing oneself and losing one's cares and concerns in perceptual engagement strike me as better captured – phenomenologically – by Schopenhauer's contemplation as 'will-lessness' and attention simply to the 'what' (rather than the wherefore or why). Even if Bolzano does not theorize any level of metacognition in the experience of beauty, his account is highly intellectual: the imagination is searching for a concept or rule, and then the subject is pleased when the concept or rule is borne out by subsequent intuitions of the object. The subject is displeased when the rule is not confirmed by subsequent intuitions.

On Bolzano's account, the experience of beauty resembles a scientific inquiry, undertaken in a desultory fashion. This phenomenology fits many experiences with somewhat challenging artworks, for example, reading literary fiction or interpreting an old master's painting. But is this really what aesthetic appreciation of a rose or sunset feels like?

Another strength, it seems to me, of the Schopenhauerian account of aesthetic experience as the will-less contemplation of the essential features of things in the world is that it seems *prima facie* better equipped to give an account of the *sublime*.

Bolzano wrote an essay on the sublime but it has, unfortunately been lost. In extant writings, he mentions the sublime only briefly in his essay 'On the Classification of the Fine Arts' as being not a subset of the concept of the beautiful but rather as the effect aimed at by works of art that aim to 'evoke feelings of admiration of God' (CFA, § 24). And there seem to be only passing references to sublime responses in his extant works and *Nachlass*.⁴³

Schopenhauer's account of will-lessness and intuitive perception of the essential features of the world seems to handle experiences of the sublime pretty well: to contemplate vast, overwhelming, threatening objects and environments, one must struggle to become will-less. But, if one can, the Ideas on offer about the vastness of nature and our being a part of it, or (in a more Kantian vein) having the human power to overcome natural threats and frustrations, are quite exalting. This demonstrates the mixed painful/pleasurable experience of being overwhelmed (cognitively and existentially) but also overcoming this experience to attain calm, aesthetic contemplation.

On both Kant and Schopenhauer's theorizing of sublime aesthetic responses, there is a kind of unfolding, turbulent, emotional process that the subject undergoes. One must overcome the feeling of being cognitively overwhelmed and/or physically or existentially threatened by (paradigmatically) vast or powerful environments or forces (jagged mountain peaks, raging storms at sea, vast expanses of desert, and so on) to derive an exalted pleasure from the experience. I pose it as an open question to Bolzano scholars and enthusiasts: does the extant aesthetic theorizing we have from Bolzano give us the resources to grapple with these emotional, mixed painful-pleasurable types of aesthetic experience?

Ultimately, it strikes me that Bolzano's theory better captures those experiences of paradigmatically artistic beauty (and perhaps cognitively rich experiences of natural beauty) that challenge us (without being too challenging or, like the sublime, overwhelming). And Schopenhauer's theory better captures those experiences of

43 Paisley Livingston, review of Bernard Bolzano, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, vol. 13, *Ästhetische Schriften*, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 63 (2023): 438–42; 'Introduction', 215.

natural and artistic beauty that either absorb us or threaten to overwhelm us, but not those that require a good deal of quasi-scientific intellectual engagement and interpretation. Both are important and fruitful developments of the Kantian picture, each of which illuminates a different terrain in the wonderful, variegated landscape of aesthetic experience.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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