ALTHOUGH the content of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's Aesthetica\(^1\) seems to be familiar in German philosophical circles, it is relatively unknown outside Germany. Most of us are aware that it was Baumgarten who coined the name “aesthetics” for the new philosophical discipline his Aesthetica was intended to establish; but as for the content of that work, our acquaintance is likely to be indirect, through two remarks of Kant. Explaining his own use of “Transcendental Aesthetic” in the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant criticizes Baumgarten’s “abortive attempt . . . to bring the critical

\(^1\) Baumgarten's Aesthetica (2 vols., Frankfurt/Oder, 1750–58; reprinted in 1 volume, [Hildesheim & New York: Georg Olms, 1970]) was unfinished at the time of his death in 1762. It was to have two main parts, corresponding to the division of logic into a theoretical part (logica docens) and a practical part (logica utens). The theoretical part was to have three chapters: Heuristic, Methodology, and Semiotic (Aes. §13). Ill health prevented Baumgarten from completing even the first chapter. A very rough idea of what the unwritten chapters would have contained can be had from the discussion of method (§66–§74) and language (§77–§111) in his early Meditationes de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus (1735), which has been reproduced and translated, with a helpful introduction, by K. Aschenbrenner and W. Holther, as Reflections on Poetry (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974). B. Poppe's dissertation, A. G. Baumgarten, seine Bedeutung und Stellung in der Leibniz-Wolfschen Philosophie und seine Beziehung zu Kant (Borna-Leipzig: R. Noske, 1907), contains a transcript of Baumgarten's course in aesthetics given in 1750 or 1750–51. Hans Schweitzer's Aesthetik als Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis (Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1972) contains a translation into German of portions of the Aesthetica, and a controversial analysis of Baumgarten's treatment of metaphysical and aestheticological truth.

Very few secondary sources on Baumgarten's aesthetics are readily available. For an extensive bibliography, see Armand Nivelle, Les théories esthétiques en Allemagne de Baumgarten à Kant (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1955). I am indebted, for its account of Baumgarten's Philosophische Briefe von Aletheophilus and Sciagraphia encyclopaediae philosophicae, to Ursula Franke's excellent monograph Kunst als Erkenntnis (Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa, Bd. X, 1972).


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treatment of the beautiful under rational principles and so to raise its rules to the rank of a science” (A21n–B36n). In the Critique of Judgment, it is generally assumed to be Baumgarten Kant has in mind when, arguing that judgments of beauty are not cognitive or “logical” judgments, he criticizes the view that beauty is perfection known confusedly or indistinctly.2 Combining Kant’s remark with Leibniz’s view that beauty is—or, more precisely, flows from—perfection, we might conclude that Baumgarten simply lowered beauty from the level of distinct to that of confused concepts and tried to deduce its rules from the concept of perfection. If this was indeed Baumgarten’s project, we might well ask to be excused from pursuing the subject further.

If Kant’s account of Baumgarten’s new “science” makes it appear singularly uninteresting, Baumgarten seems at least to be using “aesthetics” in a familiar sense, as equivalent, in Kant’s report, to “what others call the critique of taste.” Yet we also hear that it was related to “aesthetic” in Kant’s own sense of a science of sensibility, although, unlike “Transcendental Aesthetic,” it was based on the psychology of sense perception. Baumgarten’s description of aesthetics as the younger sister of logic,3 which will do for perception or sense cognition (cognitio sensitiva) what logic does for intellectual cognition, has yielded several accounts of what his Aesthetica was or ought to have been. What these accounts have in common is the presumption that Baumgarten regarded the value of aesthetics as primarily instrumental to that of logic proper. The impetus behind Baumgarten’s Aesthetica, we are told, was not so

2 Kant’s criticism of rationalist aesthetics is to be found in the Berlin Academy edition of his works, vol. V, p. 226 ff. On the basis of the apparent discrepancy between Baumgarten’s definition of beauty in Metaphysica §662 and in Aesthetica §14, Hans-Georg Juchem suggests that Kant may not have known the Aesthetica but rather got his notion of rationalist aesthetics from Baumgarten’s disciple G. F. Meier, whose Anfangsgrunde aller schoenen Kunste und Wissenschaften (1748–50) was published before the Aesthetica, and who failed to note the transformation that had taken place in Baumgarten’s thought (Die Entwicklung des Begriffs des schoenen bei Kant [Bonn: Bouvier, 1970], p. 27 ff.). See below, page 376 ff.

3 More precisely, logic is the elder sister of aesthetics (Aes. §13). Although the elder sister in question is not so much the logic of Leibniz as that of Wolff, for whom the syllogism is the means of demonstration, it was apparently Leibniz’s logical commitment regarding the analyticity of all true affirmative propositions that yielded the epistemological and metaphysical framework within which Baumgarten’s aesthetics developed.
much an interest in the problem of beauty as the requirements of Leibniz's new logic. If logic is to be an *ars inveniendi* rather than an *ars docendi*—a method for discovering what is yet unknown rather than for expounding what is already known—there is need for a discipline that will bring the confused presentations of the senses to the highest degree of perfection proper on this level of cognition. More specifically, the method Leibniz advocates is that of logical analysis, of substituting terms for the *definiens* until its inclusion in the *definiendum* becomes apparent. This method, that of making our confused concepts distinct, presupposes that we have clear but confused concepts as material for analysis. A discipline leading to the formation of clear concepts, a "logic of the lower cognitive power," would therefore have considerable instrumental value for the new science of the higher cognitive power. According to one development of this view, "Baumgarten . . . conceived his science . . . as a kind of inductive logic, in which, for instance, telescopes, thermometers, and barometers are treated as important instruments."4 According to another, Baumgarten's conception of aesthetics as the logic of sense perception should have led him to make it an inductive logic, although his concern with the extraneous notions of art and beauty confused the project.

It is true that, earlier in his career,5 Baumgarten had outlined an encyclopedia of philosophy which would include "empirical aesthetics," a science instrumental to our knowledge of nature, and mentioned that this science would use telescopes and microscopes as aids to the external senses. Christian Wolff, among others, had called for a science of this sort, illustrating the clarification of ideas by the example of a nettle sting perceived as a burning sensation and as the penetration of the skin by minute spines revealed under a microscope. But Baumgarten never carried out this project: the

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4 René Welleck, "Aesthetics and Criticism," in *The Philosophy of Kant and Our Modern World*, ed. Charles Hendel (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1970). While few would question the superiority of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* to the *Aesthetica*, Baumgarten, not Kant, was the legitimate founder of "aesthetics" as a distinct branch of philosophy. In considering Kant's contention that Baumgarten failed in his attempt to establish "aesthetics" as a science, we must remember that the *Critique of Pure Reason* had changed the criteria of "science."

conception of a logic of the lower cognitive power developed in his Aesthetica bears no resemblance to what Wolff had in mind. As for the contention that the Aesthetica ought to have been an inductive logic: the requirement is self-contradictory, since a logic of inductive inference would deal with thinking on the level of distinct concepts. What both these interpretations ignore, or at least fail to take seriously, is Baumgarten’s assertion that his new logic of sense perception has as its end the perfection of sense knowledge as such. It studies the nature of perception in order to discover rules by which perception can be brought to its own proper perfection. That our powers of perception be developed is, of course, instrumentally valuable in relation to our properly intellectual activity. No matter how logically we may think, we shall make little progress in the empirical sciences unless we have sound materials to work with, and these must be provided by the senses. Baumgarten intends, however, to carve out a sphere in which perception will enjoy a certain autonomy. His contention—and it is a radical one within the rationalist tradition—is that perception is worth developing for its own sake, and that the rules for developing it are to be derived, not from the requirements of the empirical sciences (or of morality), but from the nature of perception itself.

Once the “kind of logic” in question is more closely determined, the patent incongruity between aesthetics as the counterpart of logic and as the science that deals with beauty disappears. A good deal of analysis and argument is required, however, to establish the proposition with which Baumgarten begins his Aesthetica: “the end of aesthetics is the perfection of sense cognition as such. This, however, is beauty” (Aes. §14). If one is founding a new science, one is free to stipulate what the formal object of this science is to be, provided that the object is amenable to scientific treatment. When Baumgarten first mentioned a possible science of aesthetics, he specified that it would deal with perceptual objects, αισθητά, as distinguished from rational objects, νοητά, and noted that αισθητά are legitimate objects of a science because the science of psychology provides the basis for a normative treatment of them (Meditations §115, 116). However, one is not free to stipulate that “beauty” is identical with perception as perfected. The term “beauty” is already in use (however vague its meaning may be), and it is necessary to show that “perception perfected” and “beauty” have the same significance, that a “logic of perception” is a “critique of taste.”

The
connection between these two facets of Baumgarten’s aesthetics is implicit in the introductory paragraph of the \textit{Aesthetica}: “Aesthetics (the theory of the liberal arts, inferior gnoseology, the art of thinking beautifully, the art of the analogue of reason) is the science of sense cognition” (Aes. §1). The connection can be made explicit by clarifying, within the context of German Rationalism, the synonmys Baumgarten offers for “the science of sense cognition.” Through the explication and interweaving of these pivotal concepts, I hope to provide a more adequate understanding of what Baumgarten meant by “aesthetics.” With the nature of his project clarified, it would be superfluous to insist that Baumgarten contributed a good deal more to aesthetics than the name. Instead, I shall suggest that, despite the antiquated terminology and format of the \textit{Aesthetica}, Baumgarten’s way of dealing with a recurrent problem in aesthetics can yield insight into the tensions inherent in at least one prominent trend in contemporary aesthetic theory.

I

True to the tradition of Leibniz’s gnoseology, Baumgarten puts the representations of the “lower cognitive power” (as Wolff called the complex of faculties involved in sense perception), at the level of confused or indistinct ideas. The \textit{locus classicus} of Leibniz’s hierarchy of ideas is his “Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas,” where we find that ideas can be obscure or clear, that clear ideas can be confused or distinct, and that distinct ideas can be adequate or inadequate. A clear idea is the capacity to recognize an instance of the idea when we are presented with it again: “when I have a very clear idea of a color, I shall not take another instead of that which I ask for, and if I have a clear idea of a plant, I shall distinguish it from among other neighboring ones; without this the idea is obscure.”\footnote{The “Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas” is translated by L. E. Loemker in \textit{Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters}, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), vol. I, pp. 448–454. See also Leibniz’s \textit{Discourse on Metaphysics}, §24 (Loemker, vol. I, pp. 490–91). The text quoted above is from \textit{New Essays Concerning Human Understanding}, book I, ch. XXIX, §2, trans. A. G. Langley (La Salle: Open Court, 1949), p. 266.} Clear ideas are distinct when we can enumerate the
notes or marks of a thing that distinguish it from other, similar things. So the assayer has a distinct idea of gold because he can list the notes—color, weight, solubility in *aqua regia*, etc.—that distinguish true gold from false. Distinct ideas are adequate when they are thoroughly distinct, i.e., when the notes we enumerate are themselves distinct. They are inadequate when analysis of these notes ends in ideas which, because they are simple in their appearance to sense, are irremediably confused. So the assayer's distinct idea of gold is inadequate because the notes he lists are ultimately reducible to ideas of sense. To obtain an adequate concept of gold we would have to think of it in mathematical terms, not as gold but as continuous quantity, within which the intellect makes its own divisions where the senses perceive none.

What distinguishes sense presentations, then, is confusion; and for Leibniz, confusion is something to be eliminated wherever possible. If the mainspring of his system is his logical commitment that every true affirmative proposition is in principle analytic, the method for achieving known truth will be that of making our concepts so thoroughly distinct that the analysis terminates in explicit tautologies. Admittedly, we cannot terminate the analysis in the case of contingent truths, truths of fact, empirical propositions as such. Progress in knowledge depends, however, on approximation to this ideal. What we know confusedly by the senses we can also know, to some extent, distinctly by reason, and Leibniz's radical intellectualism commits him to replacing the confused presentations of the senses with ideas that are wholly or at least partially of non-empirical origin. It is through the distinct ideas of mathematics that we arrive at necessary or eternal truths, where the analysis can terminate in explicit tautologies and the ideal of human knowledge can be achieved. As Leibniz replied to Locke: there is nothing

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Metaphysical ideas are of non-empirical origin, being derived from reason's reflection on its own activity. Mathematical concepts are partly empirical and partly intellectual. The perception of continuous quantity is an idea of imagination, but the distinctions introduced into it arise from the power of the mind. Possible divisions in continuous quantity "are from the mind itself, for they are ideas of the pure understanding, but which are related to externality; they are also capable of definition and demonstration" (Langley trans., *New Essays*, p. 129). See also Leibniz's discussion of our ideas of place and space in his fifth paper to Clarke, §47 (Loemker trans., vol. II, pp. 1145–48).
in the intellect that was not first in the senses, except the intellect itself.\(^8\) And, for Leibniz, it is the intellect's substantive contribution—the "real" as distinguished from the logical or organizational use of reason—that enables us to rise above the limitations of the empirical. The finitude of the human intellect encumbers it with the confusion of the senses in the origins of knowledge. But once the confusion has reached the point of abstraction at which the presentation of the singular to the external senses is lost, the intellect can introduce its own ideas into the undifferentiated data of imagination.

That the mathematical ideal of human knowledge, which Leibniz inherited from Descartes, is inimical to assigning any intrinsic value to sense perception is apparent, not only from the role assigned to the senses in cognition but from the rationalist attitude toward art. Viewed as a form of cognition, our sensuous apprehension of music is, for Leibniz, confused knowledge of mathematical relations, and the pleasures we derive from it are "really intellectual pleasures confusedly known"\(^9\)—a striking confirmation of Kant's complaint that Leibniz assigned the senses only the wretched role of confusing knowledge. If art has value, it is not as cognition but as an instrument of morality. The passions must be brought under the control of reason, and it is appropriate that their cognitive counterparts, the senses, be used for this purpose. Hence Leibniz assigns poetry the didactic role of teaching the precepts of prudence.\(^10\) At

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\(^8\) Langley, trans., New Essays, p. 111.


\(^10\) In Meditations §22 Baumgarten quotes from Theodicy II §48: "The chief object of history, as well as of poetry, should be to teach prudence and virtue through examples." But he promptly turns Leibniz's dictum to his own purposes by ignoring "prudence and virtue" and discussing the superiority of "individual examples" or singular representations in achieving extensive clarity. Although Baumgarten always quotes Leibniz with great respect, he remarks pointedly, on several occasions, that the mathematician and the philosopher—the specialists in distinct knowledge—could profit from aesthetics (e.g., Aes. §42).

To discuss in detail the relation of art and morality in Baumgarten's thought would require another paper. It is clear that the artist deals with moral character only as a phenomenon or as observable—his concern is with "aesthetic ethos"—and that his representation must be "morally possible," i.e., the actions, words, and states of mind he represents must
this point, a philosopher dedicated to transmitting the Leibnizian tradition but sensitive to art might conclude that the values, though not the substance, of the tradition must be modified. If his attention had been drawn to a gap in the rationalist system—its lack of a counterpart of logic for the lower cognitive power—he might carry out his modest reformation in the process of filling that gap. As a disciple of Leibniz codified by Wolff, he would, unfortunately, vindicate the claims of sense perception in dry and pendent fashion, noting that the philosophy of art is philosophy, not art (Aes. §6). The philosopher in question is not hypothetical. He is Baumgarten, whose Aesthetica accepts the rationalist account of knowledge but insists that our distinct, intellectual knowledge is inherently defective and needs to be complemented by the kind of cognition achieved in the production and appreciation of art.

What Baumgarten realized is that the distinctness of our intellectual knowledge is bought at a price. On the level of sense cognition we find a richness (ubertas) of notes, hence a vividness in presentation (Aes. §619), that we lose in making our concepts distinct. It has been aptly suggested that “confusion” (confusio) in Baumgarten might better be rendered by “fusion,” i.e., that the emphasis is on the inseparability of notes that characterize things as they present themselves to the senses. In making a concept distinct we separate these notes and analyze each of them in turn, in an effort to make their concepts distinct. Whether or not the concept yields to this analysis of the constituent notes—whether or not the distinct concept can be made adequate—we have set off in search of “intensive clarity” for the separate notes, thereby rejecting the possibility of bringing the percept to the “extensive clarity,” the complete determination of the singular, that is its proper perfection. We have, in Prall’s terms, decided not to exploit the potentialities

be consistent with the character (Aes. §193, 405). But is he entitled to represent “vile” characters? Baumgarten seems indecisive: in general, possunt turpia pulcre cogitari . . . (Aes. §18); but compare Aes. §194 and 204. See Nivelle’s illuminating discussion, p. 55 ff. and his judicious summary: “Dès que l’art heurte une faculté quelconque de l’âme humaine, son effet total est anéanti: il ne peut faire violence a la conscience ni a la raison. Mais son but est uniquement la beauté dans la connaissance sensitive.”

11 By Aschenbrenner and Holther, p. 21: “the reader . . . must be careful to keep fusion foremost here and not confusion in the derogatory sense.”
of the aesthetic surface but to isolate each of these qualities and penetrate to the non-sensible relations that are the object of scientific and practical knowledge. If we are to achieve thoroughgoing distinctness, the sacrifice will be greater still. When we conceive the universe in terms of continuous quantities, which we can divide at will, our concepts of e.g., figures and numbers are intellectual in origin and free from the confusion inherent in concepts dependent on the senses. But, as Leibniz noted, "uniform things and those that contain no variety in them, are only abstractions, like time, space, and other entities of pure mathematics." They are well-founded phenomena, but nevertheless phenomena. The point of Leibniz's remark is that mathematics is not wholly free from the imperfection of sense knowledge: spatial and temporal relations are, metaphysically speaking, logical relations of simple substances, though only the divine intellect can apprehend these substances intuitively. Baumgarten, however, views the abstractions of mathematics, in its concern with these "beings of imagination," from a different perspective. The further we go in distinctness, the further we withdraw from the richness of the world as it presents itself to the senses, without any hope of achieving a complete concept of the individual. Our only point of contact with the existing individual in the fullness of its individuality is through the senses. Granted that, by the senses, we apprehend only the accidental determinations of the individual rather than its essence: as finite spirits, denied the divine intellect's intuition of the individual essence, we can apprehend the opulence of the individual only in confused sense presentations. "Reason," as Baumgarten notes, "is more exact than the senses, but it is also poorer." In making our concepts distinct, we proceed like the stone mason who can reduce a block of marble to the precise figure of a sphere only by discarding material. For "what is it to abstract, if not to throw away?" (Aes. §560).

What, precisely, constitutes the "extensive clarity" to which

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12 Langley, trans. New Essays, p. 110. In the preceding discussion I have limited my account of Leibniz to the aspect of his thought that got into the German Rationalist tradition, via Wolff, and formed the background of Baumgarten's thought. On Leibniz's ambivalent attitude toward the senses, see Robert F. McRae's excellent study of Leibniz's theory of knowledge: Leibniz: Perception, Apperception, and Thought (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), especially his concluding chapter, "Understanding and Sensibility."
perception can be brought, and how this can be achieved, remains to be seen. But Baumgarten's contention is that the distinctive characteristic of the lower cognitive power is the wealth of notes (ubertas, copia, abundantia, multitudo, divitiae, opes) in its representations, and that perceptual knowledge is worth developing for its own sake, as a counterpoise to the aridity of intellectual knowledge. As a good rationalist, he is not, of course, taking a stand against intellectual knowledge, which he readily grants is "superior." Among the needs his new science will fulfill he duly includes its instrumental value for intellectual knowledge: the function of aesthetics is, in part, to perfect the lower cognitive power so that it can offer "good material" to the sciences (Aes. §3, 7). But having paid his respects to the higher cognitive power and its needs, he makes it clear that this is not his primary concern. In his Meditations (§115), Baumgarten had already noted that when logic promises to improve our knowledge as such, it seems to promise more than it can deliver. For logic concerns itself only with perfecting the intellect, and there is a whole realm of knowledge that it leaves in its crude natural state. If man is not a pure intellect, his complete development requires perfecting the perceptual component in his nature as well. The Aesthetica is the new science that will emend knowledge other than distinct knowledge (Aes. §3). In short, the younger sister of logic will, as is proper, offer her services to the elder sister; but the younger sister is a person in her own right, not a slave.

13 Baumgarten, Aes. §8. Distinct cognition is superior "in finite spirits" (i.e., minds which, because of their finitude, cannot achieve a complete concept of the individual), but its "superiority" is qualified even for minds whose scientific knowledge is discursive. See below, p. 385. It is hardly surprising that Baumgarten finds it necessary to pose and answer objections to his project, e.g., that aesthetics is beneath the dignity of a philosopher (Aes. §6), that "confusion is the mother of error" (Aes. §7). In the wake of the rationalist tradition, Kant too found it necessary to offer an elaborate "Apologia for Sensibility," which has "a bad reputation," although "everyone shows the greatest respect for understanding, as is indicated by the very name we give it—the higher cognitive power." See Kant's Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, Ak. VII, p. 143 ff., my translation (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), p. 23 ff. Baumgarten is not, as Bosanquet suggests, denigrating his project: he is correcting the excesses of the rationalist tradition.

14 The relation is reciprocal. When Baumgarten discusses the proper functioning of the capacities that comprise the lower cognitive power, he
Still, the notion that Baumgarten could have been serious about assigning intrinsic value to perception is apparently hard for historians of aesthetics to accept: a reformation, as distinguished from a revolution, is not particularly dramatic. So, at the price of introducing prematurely other aspects of Baumgarten’s theory, we might note that he finds positive value even in obscure ideas, which he identifies with Leibniz’s *petites perceptions*, sense impressions which, taken by themselves, we are not aware of. In Leibniz, for whom “perception” is not essentially a cognitive term, obscure ideas seem to be of more metaphysical than epistemological interest: we are conscious of perceptions only to the extent that they are clear. In Wolff, “perception” becomes a cognitive state and obscure ideas are of no interest whatsoever: they are simply a defect of perception, a “darkness” in the soul (*Psychologia Empirica* §38). Since they serve no cognitive purpose, he does not deal with them. For Baumgarten, on the other hand, this “realm of darkness” (as distinguished from clear ideas, “the realm of light”) has the positive value of a principle of association—and it is association, not demonstration, that is the principle operative in sense cognition as such. The obscure notes that cling to our clear ideas serve to bind them together below the level of full consciousness, by introducing into our present perceptions echoes of what has disappeared from memory. They constitute “the base of the soul” (*fundus animae*), which has generally been overlooked, even by philosophers.

Baumgarten himself does not discuss obscure ideas in any detail, although he frequently notes that, along with clear ideas, they constitute the realm of knowledge that lies below the level of distinct ideas. For one thing, he introduces the subject into his aesthetics as the source of the “aesthetic impetus,” artistic inspiration, and

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15 The pivotal component of the lower cognitive power is imagination, and the “rule” of imagination is given in *Metaphysica* §561: “Lex imaginationis; percepta idea partiali recurrit eius totalis. Haec propositio etiam associatio idearum dicitur.”

16 Baumgarten, Aes. §80, *Meta.* §511. Although Kant has given a radically new epistemological interpretation of clarity and distinctness, his “anthropological” discussion of obscure ideas and their influence may well supplement Baumgarten’s cryptic remarks. See his discussion “On Ideas That We Have Without Being Conscious of Them,” *Anthropologie* (Ak. VII, p. 135 ff., my translation, p. 16 ff.).
the depths of the soul may be difficult or impossible to deal with scientifically. There are no "rules" for its functioning, knowledge of which would enable us to bring it to perfection, as there are rules for each of the natural capacities and dispositions that make up the lower cognitive power.\(^{17}\) We know in general terms what produces the aesthetic impetus, but we cannot really direct its functioning. Hence it deserves mention, but not elaboration, in the discipline that has as its end the perfection of sense cognition. What Baumgarten offers is a causal account, in terms of obscure ideas, of the "remarkable state of soul" which the ancients, through ignorance of its causes, ascribed to the workings of the gods (\textit{Aes.} §78). Moreover, Baumgarten is no advocate of obscurity for its own sake, of a random association of ideas that would yield a rhapsody of impressions incommunicable through the lower cognitive powers' \textit{facultas signatrix}, our ability to communicate sense cognition by signs. The uncontrolled influence of obscure ideas would produce "chimaeras": in perfect sense cognition it is clear ideas that predominate (\textit{Aes.} §38).\(^{18}\) Yet, if the perfection of sense cognition is the maximum fullness of notes consistent with order, the value of the obscure ideas that adhere to our clear ideas cannot be overlooked. In the artist, they provide a principle of association; and, though Baumgarten has little to say about the appreciation of art as distinguished from its production, he seems to suggest that the presence of obscure ideas may enhance the percipient's experience of the work. "Absolute obscurity" produces chimaeras, which lack the

\(^{17}\) Certain psychological conditions, which the artist may be able to produce in himself, are favorable to the aesthetic impetus, and Baumgarten discusses these in \textit{Aes.} §81–91. However, with his usual healthy skepticism about specific rules, he adds that these psychological states are "only occasions": their occurrence will not guarantee the aesthetic impetus, and the impetus may arise without them. The only rules that must be followed are those that flow directly from the nature of the lower cognitive power.

\(^{18}\) See also \textit{Meditations} §13, 38. Those poets who suppose that the more obscure and intricate their effusions are, the more poetic is their diction, are mistaken. However, the poet is entitled to suppose on the part of his readers the sort of historical and literary background that will make his use of figurative language clear. What is clear to the cultivated reader may be obscure to the uncultivated one, and the poet is entitled to aim at the cultivated reader. Baumgarten faces, here, the familiar problem of "literary" allusions and symbols: is, e.g., T. S. Eliot "obscure" because he requires the reader to have read the same materials he has in order to catch his allusions?
unity that would make the work communicable (Aes. §631): it is always a fault. But this sort of obscurity must be distinguished from the “shadows” that are essential to the unity of the work:19 the extensive clarity of the whole, which enables us to apprehend its qualitative richness as ordered and hence unified, requires a distribution of light and shade; and this seems to mean, in non-figurative language, that some parts of the work will not be characterized by a wealth of detail but only indicated. What the artist seeks is not a mere profusion of notes, but representations that are “pregnant” with meaning; and this he achieves by condensing his work through the requirements of “absolute brevity” (Aes. §160 ff.). If Baumgarten’s account of the role obscure ideas play in the production of art suggests contemporary discussions of genius in terms of the subconscious, his hints about the “shadows” present in the work suggest the notion of thickness or density of texture achieved (at least in literature) through the use of allusion, metaphor, and terms with multiple meaning.

Though Baumgarten’s primary concern is with clear ideas, the fact that he finds any value in obscure ideas indicates the sincerity of his protest against the rationalist devaluation of sense cognition. Clear and obscure ideas together form the sphere of what lies beneath the level of distinct ideas, and may profitably, so to speak, form a league against the aridity of intellectual knowledge. Wolff would have been astonished to find value assigned to a mere privation of cognition. Talk of the perfection of confused knowledge as such would have sounded odd to Leibniz. But the Aesthetica is based on the premise that “confusion” is not merely a privation of distinctness; that finite minds, denied the divine intellect’s intuition of the individual, should exploit the only means they have for apprehending its richness; in short, that we should make the most of our ontological and epistemological situation.

19 In his discussion of “aesthetic light,” Baumgarten lists some of the conditions that require material to be put into the shade (Aes. §657–662). Here, however, the role of the percipient becomes problematic. Aesthetic light is an ingredient in extensive clarity, which should be apparent even to the inattentive percipient: he should not have to strain his powers to apprehend the work (Aes. §614, 615). Although it is not easy to reconcile all of Baumgarten’s statements, he seems to be distinguishing between obscurity in the artist’s own cognition, which makes the work a chimaera, simply incommunicable, and the regard the artist should have for his public. See also Meditations §12 and Aes. §119.
However, Baumgarten is well aware that sense cognition is nevertheless cognition, and as such must measure up to the criteria of knowledge. A plenitude of notes may distinguish the confused from the distinct, but (as the notion of "extensive clarity" has already suggested) this is only half the story. Knowledge as such is apprehension of multiplicity in unity, and sense cognition is not a luxuriant rhapsody of notes, but apprehension of this richness as forming a whole. Hence the key text of the Aesthetica stresses the notion of consensus phaenomenon, a unity-in-multiplicity of sensible qualities that makes the representation coherent within itself (and with the other representations that comprise the work of art). The rationale underlying Baumgarten's identification of "beauty" with "perception perfected" begins to emerge. Within the rationalist tradition, knowledge, like aesthetic form, is characterized by multiplicity reduced to unity. What distinguishes Baumgarten's version is his concern with "confused cognition," in which "confused" represents the content or matter while "cognition" represents the reduction of the content to unity. It may be assumed that, given his position within the Leibnizian tradition, perception as perfected, based on "harmony," will have a metaphysical dimension. But it is his characterization of aesthetics as "the art of the analogue of reason" that yields the notion of a consensus within the multitude of notes that characterizes this level of cognition.

II

That aesthetics is, in Baumgarten's view, an art as well as a science may be unfortunate from the modern reader's point of view: it accounts for the concern with "rules" which makes a part of the Aesthetica philosophically uninteresting. Yet the only "rules" to which Baumgarten commits himself without reservation are innocuous applications of his philosophical tenets. At this most general level, his position is simply that theoretical knowledge of how the components of sense cognition function will yield very general precepts for directing this sort of cognition to its proper perfection. There is in man a "natural logic," innate intellectual powers which will develop regardless of any theoretical knowledge about their nature. So too there is in man a "natural aesthetic," which the child exercises in the normal process of looking, listening, and par-
particularly in playing games (Aes. §2, 54–55). Man's intellectual and aesthetic powers will, under favorable conditions, develop of themselves as he exercises them. Whether these powers will reach the perfection of which they are capable is, however, dependent on circumstances, and their development need not and should not be left to chance. Natural logic can and should be controlled by the rules of acquired or "artificial" logic. So too, natural aesthetic can and should be controlled by the rules of acquired or "artificial" aesthetic, derived from knowledge of the lower cognitive power. There is in man an innate capacity to find the connection of things by "the law of the third term" (Meta. §462), but the rules of logic can prevent mistakes in reasoning. So too man has an innate disposition to find the connection of things by associating ideas, but the rules of aesthetics prevent mistakes in connecting ideas by virtue of their association. We make a logical blunder when we assert a connection of distinct ideas that is not sanctioned by a distributed middle term. We make an aesthetic blunder when we associate indistinct ideas on the basis of some purely subjective ground which yields a chimaera, incommunicable to others through sensible signs.

Since the capacities and dispositions that comprise the lower cognitive power are present to some extent in everyone, aesthetics has "general utility," in bringing them to such perfection as they are capable of (Aes. §3, 42). But the "special use" of aesthetics is for the born artist, in whom the lower cognitive power can be brought to full perfection. Assuming that his aesthetic dispositions have not withered for lack of exercise, what can aesthetics do for him? Having advised him to acquire knowledge of God, the universe, man, history, mythology, and classical art (Aes. §63), as well as knowledge of the rules of his specific art (Aes. §68, 69), Baumgarten notes that these rules are of limited value. In general, the ignorant man can make many mistakes; and the rules of his specific art can help to prevent faults in his work and to reveal possible perfections that might otherwise not have occurred to him. But the general rules of aesthetics always take precedence over specific rules (Aes. §72), and the proper "topics" of aesthetics are just the universal aspects of beauty: ubertas, magnitudo, veritas, certitudo, lux, vita (Aes., Section X, summarized in §142).20 These characteristics of the artist’s

20 Aes. §22, which summarizes the portion of the Aesthetica Baumgarten lived to write, is worth quoting: "Ubertas, magnitudo, veritas, clar-
work are, in turn, the result of exercising the components of the lower cognitive power according to the "rules" that describe its proper functioning.

To specify these rules, we must cross the ill-defined boundary that separates "gnoseology" from "empirical psychology" in the rationalist tradition. Insofar as empirical psychology deals with the first principles of human knowledge, it belongs to metaphysics (Meta. §1). Hence, to the objection that "aesthetics is an art, not a science," Baumgarten replies: "experience shows that our art can be demonstrated, it is clear a priori, because psychology etc. provide certain principles" (Aes. §10). The "modern" psychology of Wolff is superior to the "ancient" psychology of Aristotle, not because it differs in kind, but because it gives a more detailed account of the components of sense cognition.²¹

In his Psychologia Empirica, Wolff had catalogued the capacities and dispositions of the lower cognitive power, as counterparts of those that contribute to intellectual cognition. Leibniz had remarked that animal behavior exhibits something that resembles reason (e.g., the dog cringing at the sight of a stick manifests some-

²¹ Though Wolff's "empirical psychology" is not at all what we now understand by the term, it obviously differs from Aristotle's in the conception of knowledge itself. Though Kant considers it futile to base aesthetics on empirical psychology, Baumgarten would readily agree with Kant's dictum that the function of "rules" is, on the whole, to "clip the wings of genius" and give the work of art communicable form (Aes. §555).
thing similar to memory and foresight), and Wolff, attributing imagination and memory to animals, had called them the "analogue of reason." Wolff could not, however, have anticipated the use to which Baumgarten would put this suggestion. In the Aesthetica, these dispositions appear as the native equipment of the "spirit that is by nature charming and elegant" (ingenium venustum et elegans connatum), in whom they are easily stirred and work harmoniously toward the perfection of sense cognition (Aes. §29). Under the governance of reason, and combined with the "aesthetic temperament," whose desires tend toward the production (and appreciation) of beauty (Aes. §44), they define the felix aestheticus, the artist (and the man of taste).

It will not be necessary to discuss in any detail these components of the analogue of reason. The Aesthetica refers us, for the rules of their functioning, to the relevant paragraphs of the Metaphysica, and adds some perfunctory comments about the implications of these rules for the artist. It will be enough to indicate how, when properly developed, each contributes to finding the connections of things according to the law of association rather than of demonstration.22

The "disposition to sense acutely" is, by virtue of its two facets, both the base and the apex of these components: it includes both the external senses and inner sense or sensitive self-consciousness. By the external senses the artist is, in Leibniz's terms, aware of the state of his body: sensation proper provides the "prime matter" for the work of art. By his acute inner sense, he is aware of the state of his soul and can experience and direct the effects of his other faculties (Aes. §30). These other dispositions include wit, the ability to discover resemblances among dissimilar things, and acu-

22 In Meta. §640 Baumgarten summarizes the view of "the analogue of reason" that is taken for granted in the Aesthetica. If the Metaphysica is not available for detailed discussion of these powers, the corresponding sections of Kant's Anthropologie are not a bad substitute, if used with caution. There is a good deal of Baumgarten both in Kant's Nachlass dealing with anthropology (Ak. XV) and in the Anthropologie itself, especially in its treatment of sensibility. At times, Kant takes the readers' breath away by juxtaposing a typically Baumgartian description of, e.g., "productive imagination" with a typically Kantian view of its functioning (Ak. VII, p. 167; my trans., p. 44). Kant gave his course on anthropology over a period of some thirty years before he published his lectures in 1798. Perhaps the "patchwork theory" could find some application here.
men, which detects differences among things that are similar (Aes. §32); memory, which connects present perceptions with perceptions previously experienced (Aes. §33); foresight, which connects the past with the future through the present (Aes. §36); and reproductive imagination, which brings a phantasm to mind when the object is no longer present (Aes. §31). Of particular importance to the artist is the power of using signs, which connects signs with things and with each other, and so makes his knowledge communicable (Aes. §37). So too is the sensitive analogue of judgment, the disposition to apprehend perfection or deformity by taste (Aes. §35). All of these contribute to the exercise of a capacity that has no correlate in the higher cognitive power: the creative power (facultas fingendi), which is a function of reproductive imagination aided by wit. As "creative" or productive, imagination recombines given phantasms to produce images never experienced and, on a broader scope, combines these images in novel ways (Aes. §31).

When we recall that the "horizon" or sphere of the lower cognitive power is defined, on its material side, by a multitude of perceivable qualities, the sense of Baumgarten's discussion can be readily extracted from his antiquated term "the analogue of reason." The notes contained in what is actually present to the senses or reproduced by imagination are enriched by what memory, wit, acumen, and foresight contribute. But the exercise of these dispositions does not yet produce the full perfection of sense cognition. On the material side, a further degree can be attained by breaking down these phantasms and recombining their elements into new and richer ones: on the side of unity, these new phantasms must be internally coherent and consistent with one another. "This is the rule of the facultas fingendi: the parts of the phantasm are perceived as one whole" (Meta. §590). Whether they are coherent or not will be discerned by taste. But the consensus of dispositions is still incomplete: the facultas signatrix must express in sensible signs the product of the facultas fingendi.23

23 In view of Baumgarten's theory that art is cognition, it is as well to stress that the signs must be audible, visual, or tactual; perfected perception is, in a sense, "expression," but there is no suggestion of anything like a Croce-Collingwood view of art as an intuition which may or may not be recorded in a sensible medium. That Baumgarten takes this for granted is clear from Aes., §20, but it is made explicit by one of his followers: "Die Zeichen, wodurch wir unser Inre ausdruecken, muessen auch mit den
To all these dispositions of the lower cognitive power must be added intellect or reason, which is often necessary to discover or bring about their harmony (Aes. §38). Not only does intellect discover the rules of the lower cognitive power and construct the science of aesthetics: it directs, in accordance with these rules, the changes in the soul experienced by inner sense. Its presence introduces a potential danger: that intellect, striving toward its distinctive perfection, will lead the artist to impose on his work “logical” requirements that make his work “scholastic” or “frigid” (Aes. §105). But Croce’s charge that Baumgarten “contaminated” aesthetics by an element foreign to it is unjustified.24 In aesthetic representation, intellect’s role is to serve the requirements of the lower cognitive power, which it alone is capable of understanding. Its role is, rather paradoxically, to stimulate the “aesthetic impetus” and, once ideas are flowing rapidly, to ensure that they fuse into a coherent whole, according to the nature of the lower cognitive power. “False rules are always worse than no rules” (Aes. §73), and false rules include those that produce an “unnatural style,” contra naturam. This notion of the “natural style” adds still another dimension to Baumgarten’s identification of beauty with perception perfected.

By considering aesthetics as “the gnoseology of the lower cognitive power,” we found that perfect sense cognition is a consensus
phaenomenon, a multitude of indistinct representations apprehended as unity. From aesthetics as "the art of the analogue of reason," we know not only how the consensus is produced but also that perfect sense cognition is a work of art, a complex of sensible signs completing the artist's cognitive act. Given the pre-eminence of the creative power in him, we can consider his cognition from the dual perspective of a cognitive activity and of "a world that the artist, as it were, creates out of himself" (Aes. §20, 34). To think beautifully is to think "naturally." So far we have stressed the nature of the cognitive activity. But we can add a further dimension to Baumgarten's definition of beauty by considering the nature of this new world that is a perfect sense cognition.25

III

The characterization of aesthetics as the art of thinking beautifully brings to a head the issue of Baumgarten's relation to his predecessors and successors regarding the status of beauty. "The end of aesthetics," as we have seen, "is the perfection of sense cognition as such. This, however, is beauty" (Meta. §521, 622). The paragraph (§622) of the Metaphysica to which he refers us, however, defines beauty as perfectio phaenomenon, perfection as apprehended indistinctly.26 But perfection known by the lower cognitive power is not the same as the perfection of the lower cognitive power. Among those commentators and historians who have noted this discrepancy there is almost unanimous agreement that a dramatic shift took place between the Metaphysica of 1739 and the Aesthetica of 1750. In the earlier work, it is said, Baumgarten still adhered to the tradition of Leibniz and Wolff in making beauty an ontological predicate; in the Aesthetica, he broke with this tradition in making it a characteristic of knowledge rather than of things.27

25 Baumgarten himself discusses the aspects of perfection or beauty more in terms of the content of the work than of cognitive activity. It is taken for granted, from all that precedes this systematic discussion, that the work is both an object and a cognition.
26 "Perfectio phaenomenon, s. gustui latius dicto observabilis, est pulcritudo, imperfectio phaenomenon, seu gustui latius dicto observabilis, est deformitas."
27 Of the commentators cited in this paper, only Franke stresses the continuity of the two definitions, though not in precisely the way I treat it.
Since "perfection as perceived" is clearly not identical with "perfect perception," some kind of shift did take place between these two definitions. But Baumgarten's reference, in his "new" definition of beauty, to the allegedly inconsistent text of the *Metaphysica* suggests that there is no real inconsistency. In a thinker as systematic as Baumgarten, this citation suggests, rather, a shift in perspective from metaphysician to philosopher of art.

As metaphysician, Baumgarten's concern is with the nature of being and, in the Leibnizian tradition, being, taken both distributively and collectively, is multiplicity in unity, perfection, or harmony. The ultimate metaphysical unit is the monad or simple substance, which in its states is a mirroring or "expression" of the universe. Each monad, therefore, represents a degree of perfection, a level of harmony. Moreover, the actual world comprises the maximum number of substances and their states that are composable, consistent with the unity that makes them a universe. It is therefore the most perfect or harmonious of all possible worlds. If rationalist metaphysics simply equated beauty with harmony, it would reduce philosophy of art to a footnote instructing the artist to "imitate nature" (or some portion of it), in the most obvious sense of the phrase. But beauty adds to harmony the self-conscious apprehension of this harmony; hence the quotation from Leibniz continues: "and, since any particular being agrees with one rather than another being, there flows from this harmony the order from which beauty arises, and beauty awakens love."28 Beauty has its ontological basis in perfection or harmony, but adds to it the apprehension of order, which is an ordering, a cognitive activity. There is, in principle, room within the rationalist tradition for a genuine philosophy of art.

Though Leibniz himself took no systematic interest in questions of beauty and art, it is clear that for him the apprehension from which beauty arises must be primarily intellectual. What distinguishes perception from other kinds of "expression" or isomorphic representation is that perception is a mirroring of multiplicity in the unity of a substance; and as we move up the scale from unconscious to conscious perception and through the hierarchy of conscious perceptions or ideas, we find that "the greater a power is, so much

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the greater is the manifold it reduces to unity and represents in itself.”29 Though beauty arises at the level of confused ideas, the multiplicity reduced to unity in our distinct ideas is incomparably greater in its extension. However, a systematic concern with beauty would have required some distinction, within the “logical horizon,” to reconcile the metaphysician’s account of beauty with “beauty” as marking an experiential distinction. While the metaphysician indeed knows that the actual universe exhibits the greatest harmony of all possible worlds, he knows this only as an inference from the principle of sufficient reason in its teleological aspect: his finite perspective prevents him from understanding how this harmony has been realized. In working out this distinction, Leibniz might well have developed a philosophy of art quite different from the sort of mimetic theory his metaphysics would at first seem to require.30 For Baumgarten, however, there is no such prima facie requirement. Having followed Wolff in making beauty perfection apprehended indistinctly, or locating it within the “aesthetic horizon,” he has no reason to suppose that any perfection apprehended intellectually will also be apparent to the lower cognitive power. Some existing objects may be apt for both aesthetic and logical representation, such as to yield both extensive and intensive clarity. Others may be above or below the aesthetic horizon (Aes. §123 ff.). What we can recognize only intellectually as embodying a high degree of perfection lies outside the artist’s province. As for perfection discernible both intellectually and by taste: while Baumgarten never doubts the existence of natural beauty, he regards whatever is given to the senses as material for the constructed beauty with which he is concerned. Baumgarten has not retracted his metaphysical definition of beauty. But his interest now lies in the “world” that is the artist’s cognition, and the artist, whose task

29 Ibid., p. 699. On perception as a species of expression, see McRae, *Leibniz: Perception, Apperception and Thought*, ch. 3.

30 Leibniz seems already to have departed from it in his well-known example of music (note 9 above), according to which the pleasures of sense arise from confused awareness of mathematical ratios. As Hanslick points out, there is no music in nature. “Very seldom, and even then only in an isolated manner, does nature bring forth a musical note of definite and measurable pitch. But a musical note is the foundation of all music.” *The Beautiful in Music*, trans. Gustav Cohen (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), p. 109.
it is to achieve perfect sense cognition, is in no way committed to representing the actual universe.

Yet Baumgarten does insist that the supreme task of the artist is to “imitate nature” (*Aes.* §104), and Leibniz’s metaphysics of perfection is one of the cornerstones of the *Aesthetica*. We can best approach this conjunction of metaphysics, theory of knowledge, and “the art of thinking beautifully” through the sense in which Baumgarten regards art as mimesis.

In a key passage of his *Meditations*, Baumgarten had suggested that if “nature” is taken in the sense of “the intrinsic principle of change in the universe,” our perceptual representations of nature and of the actions dependent on it are “poetic.” It is in this sense that a poem, a perfect discourse at this level of cognition, is an imitation of nature (*Med.* §9, 110). What the poet imitates, though not by design (*Med.* §108), is the creative principle of the universe and the actions that are its consequences.

[T]he poet is like a maker or creator. So the poem ought to be like a world. Hence by analysing whatever is evident to the philosophers concerning the real world, the same ought to be thought of a poem.\(^{31}\)

What is evident to philosophers is that the principle according to which the world is created is the principle of perfection, which is itself derivative from the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason. In the *Aesthetica*, the theme of the artist as “creator” is developed in terms of “aesthetic truth,” which is the artist’s “third concern,” i.e., one of the universal aspects of beauty.\(^{32}\)

\(^{31}\) Here, as in other quotations from the *Meditationes*, I use the translation by Aschenbrenner and Holther. Baumgarten has found an ingenious way of reconciling the notions of genius and mimesis. Note that the poet is only *like* a creator, and his poem *like* a world. He does not, of course, create literally, since the sensations which are the raw material of his work are given. More important, what he produces is only analogous to a world. It is true that he adds something to the number of existing objects in the physical universe; but his poem, regarded as a sensible object, is a complex of signs, to be taken primarily as communication of his thoughts. Hence the “truth” of his work is to be considered as “subjective” rather than as “objective” or “metaphysical truth,” as the truth of cognition rather than as the truth of objects.

\(^{32}\) Since the artist’s concern is with the perfection of perceptual rather than of discursive knowledge, Baumgarten begins his discussion by distinguishing between “aesthetic truth” and “logical truth in the stricter sense” (*Aes.* §423, 424). But he soon notes that the truth characteristic
A perfect sense cognition is the expression, in sensible signs, of what the artist's "creative power" has produced. It is, therefore, a "fiction." Yet the perfection of knowledge as such is truth. In dealing with this recurrent paradox of a "true fiction," Baumgarten has the advantage of metaphysical principles that will resolve it and, at the same time, remove the sting from any disparagement of his new science as beneath the dignity of a philosopher (Aes. §6).

The task of the artist is to produce "fictions"; but Baumgarten distinguishes between fictions in a wider and in a narrower sense. Some fictions are "historical" (e.g., the storm in the Aeneid). They are fictions because a new phantasm has been formed by recombining the data yielded by the external senses and prescinding from whatever might detract from its perceived coherence (Aes. §505); they are historical because these phantasms could find their place in the actual world, although we are not concerned with whether they happened or not (Aes. §509). The artist's creative power, exercised to this extent, produces so to speak an aesthetically perfect version of the real world, enriched to the maximum fullness consistent with unity. In some cases, however, the artist takes a greater risk: stretching his creative power to its limits, he produces a "heterocosmic" fiction, one that could not take place in the actual world (e.g., the cave of Aeolus) (Aes. §511, 518). The risk he takes is that of producing a "false" fiction, a chimaera, which, being internally inconsistent or self-contradictory, could not be found in any possible world. Though the risk is present in any exercise of the creative power, it is greater here, where he has nothing to guide him but the "rule of the facultas fingendi," in the exercise of which all the dispositions of the lower cognitive power are "conspiring" to produce a beautiful cognition. It is the analogue of judgement that will recognize his "creation" as aesthetically true (possible or coherent, hence beautiful) or aesthetically false (impossible or absurd, hence ugly) (Aes. §426).

...
Though Baumgarten has discussed explicitly only the production of phantasms, the principles governing their "creation" are clearly to be extended to the "world" they form: the Aesthetica was to deal with the nexus of notes into phantasms, of these cognitions with one another, and of signs with cognitions and among themselves. What is required of any world is conformity with the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason. Any possible world exhibits objective or metaphysical truth, the conformity of things to universal principles (Aes. §423), and the real world conforms, further, to the principle of perfection. This is "evident to the philosophers." But subjective truth, the representation in the soul of metaphysical truth, can be either logical or aesthetic (i.e., aestheticological), depending on whether the "order of many in one" is represented distinctly or indistinctly (Aes. §424). If the risk the artist takes in producing a heterocosmic fiction pays off, he will "create" a new world that is aesthetically perfect and therefore pre-eminently true, by virtue of its conformity with the principles of a most perfect universe. For the sake of his public, he will embed these heterocosmic fictions in a context of historical fictions (Aes. §505 ff.); but his introduction of heterocosmic fictions— which are not compossible with the actual world— makes it a new world in which aesthetically rewarding but factually impossible objects and events are possible. Its truth is the verisimilitude (Aes. §473) achieved through the compossibility—the ordo plurimum in uno— of the wealth of representations that is the artist's first concern. It is "natural," precisely because conformity with the nature of the lower cognitive power yields an analogue of a universe, a cognition characterized, both in its basic structure and in all the exfoliations of this structure,

33 If the principle of perfection stresses ubertas or plurality, the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason stress consistency or unity. In the Meditations, the analogy between the world and a poem runs through Baumgarten's discussion of "lucid order" or method, the general rule of which is that "poetic representations are to follow each other in such a way that the theme is progressively represented in an extensively clearer manner" (§71). The theme, the principle of unity, is "that whose representation contains the sufficient reason of other representations supplied in the discourse, but which does not have its sufficient reason in them" (§66). The same principle ensures that there can be only one theme, with which all other "themes" are connected, and to which every element is subordinated (§65–68). If the artist is imitating the principle of perfection, Baumgarten is entitled to use the more basic principles at will.
by the perceptual multiplicity in unity that we have come to call “aesthetic form.” Hence Baumgarten can quote with approval the dictum of Shaftsbury, “one of the supreme arbiters of elegance among the English”: “all beauty is truth” (Aes. §556).

The philosopher of art does adopt a different perspective on beauty from the metaphysician. Baumgarten’s claim to originality stems from his recognition of what rationalist metaphysics and theory of knowledge could yield from the perspective of the liberal or “non-mechanical” arts, those that do not serve man’s material needs. There is nothing particularly original in his metaphysics, with its definition of beauty, or in his notion of a science of sense cognition, with all this involves regarding confused ideas and the components of the lower cognitive power. All this was commonplace in the tradition of Wolff and Leibniz. Baumgarten’s sensitivity to art might have left him devoted, in his non-professional moments, to an activity he must disparage in his professional capacity. Instead, he recognized the potentialities of this tradition for a science that would provide, not the rules for any specific art, but the theory underlying them all. The Aesthetica’s definition of beauty as perfect sense cognition encapsulates his exploitation of these possibilities.

IV

Around the bi-centennial of the Aesthetica, Baumgarten’s project of a “theory of the liberal arts”—a philosophy of the arts based firmly on theory of knowledge—might have seemed as much an historical curiosity as his concern with the “analogue of reason.” Now cognitive theories of art are respectable again, and the most prominent of them—Susanne Langer’s—shows a marked “family resemblance” to Baumgarten’s theory, as well as a radical divergence from it. If the Aesthetica can shed any light on contemporary philosophy of art, it would seem reasonable to look for illumination in an area cognate to it. As Francis Sparshott has noted,34 Langer has revived Baumgarten’s conception of aesthetics as “the education

of perception.” More significantly, however, she considers perception worth educating, and attempts to rehabilitate its claims in the general context of a positivist theory of knowledge that, with its stress on the “formal” as distinguished from the “material” mode of language, makes any respectable kind of knowledge at least as arid as the Leibnizian ideal. Langer’s project is, to this extent, similar to Baumgarten’s: within a context, apparently hostile to the claims of perception, to assign value to perception, in addition to its purely instrumental value for the constructs of discursive reason. Langer’s approach, however, is more ambitious than Baumgarten’s. For Baumgarten, the work of art is, so to speak, self-justified, as the perfection of a component in human nature. For Langer, the work of art is our only way of symbolizing, and therefore comprehending, “the life of feeling” as distinguished from the physical universe.

The “new key” that has been sounded in philosophy—the notion of human mental activity as symbolic transformation—implies that we can comprehend only what we can symbolize. If “symbol” is equated, as the positivists would have it, with discursive language; if a symbol must be isomorphic with its object; and if the structure of discursive language is isomorphic with that of the physical universe but radically different from that of “the life of feeling,” then we have no way of making the life of feeling intelligible. Her solution is to propose another kind of symbol—the non-discursive or “presentational” symbol, i.e., the work of art—which is isomorphic with feeling and enables us to comprehend it.

Langer’s notion of art as a presentational symbol has been attacked and defended on two counts: philosophers of science have protested her extension of “symbol,” and philosophers of art have been concerned that regarding art as a symbol denies it intrinsic value. Her theory has given rise to an extensive literature. Her magnum opus, Mind, however, suggests a further difficulty in the notion of art as a presentational symbol. Building on the theory of the art-symbol she developed in her work in aesthetics, Langer contends that what art reveals about the morphology of feeling can provide the basis for a genuine science of psychology, since all mental activity is a development or form of feeling. The question arises: what, then, becomes of art? Her discussion of myth, another kind of presentational symbol, concludes with a Goetterdaemmerung: in
"the silly conflict of religion and science," science must triumph because religion rests on a young and provisional form of thought, to which philosophy of nature—proudly called 'science' or 'knowledge'—must succeed if thinking is to go on." But while the gods of myth have their twilight, the epic lives on because it is the first flower of "a new symbolic mode, the mode of art," which is "great with possibilities, ready to take new meanings and express ideas that have had no vehicle before."35 Will the new science of psychology be the mature vehicle of ideas which will replace the young and provisional form of thought that is art? At the very least, must not art lose its importance as the only way we have of symbolizing, and hence understanding, the inner life? "Our interest in music," Langer insists, "arises from its intimate relation to the all-important life of feeling."36 Once we have the science of psychology, shall we cease to be interested in music, and in the other arts (to which her theory of music as a symbol has proved applicable)? From a finite perspective this appears unlikely, and Langer seems to have no intention of proclaiming the death of art. Yet cognitive theories of art that begin by exalting it have been known to end by pronouncing the death sentence on it (though not necessarily from a finite perspective).

Whatever Langer's solution to the dilemma may be, recognition of Baumgarten's legitimate title as the founder of aesthetics might serve as a caution to cognitive aesthetic theories against putting too heavy a burden on the work of art. Baumgarten's claim for art is a modest one: given the nature of man, his perfection requires the development of his potentialities for both perception and discursive reasoning. Because the two modes of perfection, perceptual and discursive, are different, there can be no displacement of art by science. The work of art is not a symbolic form, but rather the use of signs (and, in the case of literature, symbols) to articulate a perceptual form. Since the work of art is not a symbol, its role cannot be usurped by the symbolic product of man's higher cognitive power. Reason, according to Baumgarten, is "superior" in finite

spirits, i.e., minds incapable of intellectual intuition, but only in "weightier matters," such as science and morality. But "to posit the one [kind of knowledge] is not to exclude the other" (Aes. §8). Hence art—perception perfected—is assured a permanent place in human experience. Modesty may have its own rewards.  

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37 I am indebted to my colleague William Snyder for his very helpful criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.