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Habits of Beauty

Towards a “Hexiologia Aesthetica” in the Early Modern Age

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Abstract. In this paper I make a case that the identity of disciplinary aesthetics in its inception is grounded in the habituation of αἴσθησις rather than in αἰσθησις as mere epistemic apprehension. To do so, I examine how disciplinary aesthetics arose within the revival of *habitus* and intellectual virtues in the early modern age, and argue that its ultimate goal was to develop beauty as a specific set of *habitus* of sensibility. Accordingly, I interpret Baumgarten’s doctrine of the six perfections of sensible knowledge as guidelines of ascetic pathways aimed at restoring the health of the lower faculties of the soul. While the internalization of *habitus* gives identity to the aesthetic subject, I conclude, this identity takes life only if «inspired», hence in a fruitful exchange with the environment in which the subject is embedded, and in general with the whole universe. In this sense, nascent aesthetics is both ascetic and environmental.

Keywords. Baumgarten; habitus; spiritual exercises; habitat; environmental aesthetics.

Introduction

As is well known, the crisis of aesthetics as a philosophy of art around the 1970s coincided

with a rediscovery of Baumgarten's aesthetic thought. Baumgarten, the baptizer of aesthetics, was recognized as the herald of a different meaning of the discipline revolving around the kerygmatic core of αἴσθησις, namely sensible knowledge. But does αἴσθησις have to do with ἐπιστήμη alone? Is aesthetics only the systematization of a kind of knowledge in the form of a science? Some of the latest research on the germinal stages of philosophical aesthetics across Europe has rather brought to the fore the importance of the ascetic dimension of spiritual exercises, for example in the regulation of imagination (see Trop [2013], [2015]; Rydberg [2017]; Bacalu [2023]). Interpreted from this point of view, Baumgarten's project seems to aim primarily at the practical making of beauty in one's own thought, and ultimately in one's own life.

If this is true, then at the heart of nascent aesthetics we should find not only a body of knowledge, but also a set of habituation techniques. What role does *habitus* play in the emergence of disciplinary aesthetics? What relationship exists between αἴσθησις and ἔξις in this context? How can αἴσθησις be habituated? In what follows I intend to contribute to the framing of these questions. First, I will show that the investigation in this direction provides new insights into the relationship between nascent aesthetics and the noetization of modern metaphysics, where the Aristotelian theme of intellectual virtues was central. Second, I will focus on the possible extension of the discourse of intellectual virtues to sensibility, starting from the notion of εὐαίσθησία. Third, I will examine the theme of aesthetic exercise in Baumgarten, as well as its role in the development of *habitus pulchre cogitandi*. Fourth, I will focus on the habitual directions of sensible thinking advanced by Baumgarten, looking at his six criteria of epistemic excellence as guidelines for the achievement of aesthetic virtues. Finally, I will consider the relationship between *habitus* and habitat in the moment of aesthetic inspiration. While *habitus* contribute to the identity of the aesthetic subject against the backdrop of the tiny perceptions from which it emerges, I will argue, this identity will take life precisely in the moment in which the subject becomes aware of the usually non-perceived threads which connect it to the whole universe from the point of view of its body. In this sense, I will conclude, nascent aesthetics is at once ascetic and environmental.

A science of habitus

One of the main achievements of late Scholastic philosophy, inextricably linked to the birth of modern ontology, is the noetization of metaphysics. According to the Calvinist Clemens Timpler (1563-1624), the godfather of modern ontology who established the standard of *Schulmetaphysik* in the Protestant world (Freedman [2009]), the most fundamental notion of metaphysics is no

longer, as in the Aristotelian tradition, *ens quatenus ens* (being qua being), but *intelligibile quatenus intelligibile* (intelligible qua intelligible), or rather *πάν νοητόν*, *omne intelligibile*, hence everything that can be objectified by the intellect¹. In this sense, Timpler goes as far as to think that the notion of *νοητόν* is even more general than the distinction between *nihil* (nothing) and *nonnihil* (or *aliquid*: not nothing or something), thereby granting metaphysics supreme universality. Among the consequences of this approach is a renewed interest in the problem of knowability. Indeed, if a being is such only insofar as it is accessible to knowledge, it will be necessary to preliminarily examine the cognizable as such, regardless of the object known. This examination is carried out by a new propaedeutic discipline of metaphysics that authors such as the Lutheran theologian and philosopher Abraham Calov (1612-1686) call «gnostology» (Calov [1650]). Gnostology intends to study not simply the punctual apprehension of knowledge, but the human *habitus* underlying that apprehension, specifically the *habitus* of contemplating the cognizable *qua talis*².

The centrality of *habitus* following the cognitive turn in metaphysics is crucial to our discourse. As is well known, Aristotle expounds his influential doctrine of *habitus* particularly in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and connects it to the acquisition of virtue. As Aristotle points out, «excellence [or virtue] (ἀρετή), then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual excellence in the main owes its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral excellence comes about as a result of habit (ἔξ ἔθους)» (1103a15-b25, trans. W. D. Ross). In both the intellectual and moral spheres, then, the acquisition of ἀρετή requires a process of habituation. Commenting upon the Aristotelian doctrine and its reception, Timpler devotes a whole treatise to the problem of *habitus*: *Hexiologia, hoc est, Doctrina generalis de habitibus* (1618), where *habitus* or ἔξις is considered as «a permanent quality by means of which a human being is inclined to act well or badly» (Timpler [1606a]: 28; [1618]: 84). More specifically, the good *habitus*, which enables the perfecting of the subject in which it is inherent, is called «virtue» and the bad *habitus* is called «vice» (Timpler [1618]: 104³). Intellectual virtue will then be that which enables the subject to be perfected in relation to intellectual actions, and disposes the subject to know true and false well (Timpler [1618]: 124⁴).

The good *habitus* concerning the intellect, namely intellectual virtue, had already demonstrated its theoretical relevance in a preparatory treatise to the second edition of Timpler's *Metaphysica* (1606), with title *Technologia*, where Timpler discusses the nature and mutual relations of the liberal arts to one another. Timpler here asserts that the liberal arts (theology, philosophy, and philology with their derivations) are not just systems of rules towards the perfection of the human being (Timpler [1606a]: 1), but can also be viewed as *artes liberales internae*, that is, as intellectual *habitus*, arising from the assimilation of these rules

in one's life (Timpler [1606a]: 27⁵). Intellectual *habitus*, then, is here a discipline from the subjective point of view, that is, the outcome of the reconversion of the practitioner's existence following the learning of that given *ars*.

In the early-modern revival of the doctrine of *habitus* and intellectual (and moral) virtues, the reconversion stemming from the process of habituation is often viewed through a Christian lens, insofar as the resulting virtues aim to provide a tool to make up for the weaknesses of human nature corrupted by sin. Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638), a Calvinist polymath and encyclopedist influenced by Timpler's metaphysics, argues in his own *Technologia* that if philosophy is to remain true to its vocation as *medicina mentis*, then each discipline will be summoned to medicate one of the powers of the soul, either the intellect (theoretical and poetic) or the will (Alsted [1620]: col. 80⁶; see on this Hotson [2000]: 70-2). By developing a second nature through *habitus*, each discipline will thus make a contribution to the cure of the humans' tainted being, at least as far as it is possible without divine grace.

To accomplish this process of habituation which is also a process of remodeling of human nature, a triad of efficient causes is necessary, that is, nature or wit, hence the inborn disposition to acquire a certain set of rules; *doctrina*, the set of rules to be learned; and *exercitatio* (ἄσκησις), the frequent repetition of similar acts, which ensures enduring assimilation (Timpler [1606a]: 28-9⁷). While the first two features are remote causes, the latter is the proximate cause of any internal liberal art. Ἀσκησις is thus the primary means for shaping *homo habitus-alis*, hence also the main medicine for possibly restoring his health.

From εὐαίσθησις to beauty

If the *habitus* of the mind primarily concerns intellect and will, so that the resulting virtues are either intellectual or moral, what about sensibility? The position of the German philosopher Jakob Thomasius, professor of Aristotelian philosophy at the University of Leipzig and one of Leibniz's mentors, can be of help in this regard. In his *Philosophia practica* (1661), Thomasius deals with pleasure, which results from the concurrence of two perfections, one *ex parte facultatis cognoscentis* and the other *ex parte objecti cognoscibilis* (Thomasius [1661]: table XXX). While in the latter case the perfection has a different name according to the organ that receives the stimulus (beauty in the case of visible objects, sweetness in the case of tasteable objects, truth in the case of intelligible objects, etc.), the perfections of the cognitive faculty can only be two, one of the senses and one of the intellect. In the case of the intellect such perfection is a *habitus intellectualis seu virtus*, while in the case of the senses Thomasius uses the term εὐαίσθησις, keen sense-perception, a term already used in classical

Greek (see Plato, *Timaeus*, 76d2) and considered to be a kind of somatic virtue (see Philo, *De Abrahamo*, 263). In Thomasius εὐαισθησία is the sensible counterpart of intellectual virtue and represents, as it were, the health of the senses, their εὐεξία. Although Thomasius does not elaborate on the subject, this observation calls for further investigation. For if εὐαισθησία is a kind of virtue, what is the ἔξις of αἴσθησις? In what way can αἴσθησις be subjected to habituation? It is against the background of these questions that disciplinary aesthetics will enter the domain of philosophy.

As is evident from the beginning of his *Metaphysica*, Baumgarten is well aware of the cognitive turn in metaphysics, which he generically attributes to the Schoolmen in the *Sciagraphia* (SC §§ 125-127). In this sense, Baumgarten defines metaphysics as «the science of the first principles in human knowledge» (M § 1). If it is true that «the more general predicates of a being are the first principles of human knowledge» (M § 3), then the something-as-possible is the representable (M § 8). The choice of the term «repraesentabile» over, for example, the term «intelligibile», linked with the intellect in the strict sense, is significant. As Baumgarten writes in his *Philosophia generalis*, the intelligible as νοητόν cannot be considered the defining feature of philosophy in the sense of metaphysics (PhG § 23), for along with νοητά (the something as intelligible) there are also αισθητά (the something as sensible) (Baumgarten [1735]: § 116; K § 1). By using the neutral term «repraesentabile», Baumgarten therefore implicitly includes both νόησις and αἴσθησις as specific *modi considerandi* of the *res*; in the αισθητόν the determinations of the being are not abstracted as much as is the case with the νοητόν, thus giving peculiar access to the material truth of the *res* itself (see for ex. AE § 560). It is on this gnostological-metaphysical basis that aesthetics can carry out its gnoseological-instrumental task of correctly directing the lower faculties of the soul, hence of pursuing the perfection of sensible knowledge⁸.

With this legacy in mind, we can now better compare Thomasius' conception with Baumgarten's. For Baumgarten as well as for Thomasius the perfection of sensible knowledge has two aspects: one related to the perfection of what we sensibly perceive and the other related to the perfection of sensible knowledge as such⁹. Baumgarten, however, unlike Thomasius, traces both aspects back to beauty. Beauty, then, is not related solely to the material dimension of sensible knowledge; rather, it can have both a material and a formal dimension. From this perspective, the εὐαισθησία of which Thomasius speaks, the good αἴσθησις, corresponds to the perfection of sensible knowledge *qua talis*, hence to beauty in its formal aspect, which is the goal of aesthetics according to Baumgarten (AE § 14¹⁰). Aesthetics must then teach how to refine sensible knowledge even if the object of thought is imperfect (AE § 18¹¹). In aesthetics thus resonates the requirement of gnostology, which intends to analyze the cognizable *qua talis*,

regardless of the type of object of our knowledge: the cognizable as a possible object. Interpreted in the broader context of the cognitive turn of scholastic metaphysics, aesthetics claims its transcendental vocation from the very beginning.

Aesthetic subject as ascetic subject

How is it possible to perfect the formal dimension of sensible knowledge? If εὐαίσθησία represents the counterpart of the intellectual *habitus* or virtue, it is evident that beauty also has an ascetic dimension. It is this ascesis of the sensible within the sensible that aesthetics is properly concerned with. Aesthetics thus provides the rules and tools for directing the lower faculties of the soul in a way that leads its practitioner to develop a *habitus pulchre cogitandi*, a skill in thinking beautifully (AE § 47¹²).

The aspect that interests us most in this regard is that of aesthetic exercise, which constitutes the core of the cultivation of the sensible: «To the character of the gifted aesthetician one requires [...] exercise, and aesthetic exercise» (AE § 47; see Trop [2013]; [2015]: ch. 1; Frey [2016]; Pollok [2021]). Baumgarten contrasts exercise with external imposition, for example that of Orbilius, Horace's schoolmaster, who did not hesitate to use the cane with his students. Conversely, exercise is «the frequent repetition of homogeneous actions or similar actions in relation to a specific difference» (M § 577; AE § 47). Exercise plays a key role in the development of *habitus*. In the *Metaphysica*, *habitus* or proficiencies, which Baumgarten already discusses in ontology (M § 219), are psychologically defined as «greater degrees of the faculties of the soul» (M § 577; the *habitus* of the cognitive faculties are called «theoretical»). In this way, the formation of *habitus* turns out to be crucial in the very process of subjectification. In fact, since the notion of *subjectum* in Baumgarten no longer just refers to the soul as a bearer of properties, but also indicates an agent with greater or lesser power to produce effects (M § 527; see Menke [2003]: 748-751; 2014; see more in general Karskens [1992]: 235-240; Kruglov [2011]: 100-102), the increase in the degree of the faculties by means of habituation will be functional to the increase of the subject's agency.

Just like Timpler ([1618]: 109-110), Baumgarten distinguishes *habitus* into inborn, acquired, and supernaturally infused. *Habitus*, therefore, are not only acquired through exercise, as Wolff had asserted among others (Wolff [1732]: § 430: «*Habitus* is not acquired except through exercise, and disposition is transformed into *habitus* through exercise»), for a naturally strong disposition of the soul can already be called *habitus*; in any case it must then be further augmented by exercise, since a *habitus*, as unanimously recognized, recedes due to the interruption of the frequent actions that support it or due to the acquisition of opposite *habitus* (AE § 48; K § 48; Timpler [1618]: 97-98; Wolff [1732]: §§ 431-433).

Habitus (proficiency) is strictly linked with *consuetudo* (habit), *consuetudo* being «the proficiency that reduces the necessity of attention in certain actions» (M § 650). While for Wolff *consuetudo agendi* as «*habitus agendi ex determinatione praeterita*» (Wolff [1732]: § 923) takes on a suspicious connotation, since it depends on motives remembered only confusedly (Wolff [1732]: § 924: «A habit of acting is the proficiency of acting on the basis of a past determination, or that which occurs by virtue of past motives, as we remember in a confused manner what we have perceived»), in Baumgarten *consuetudo* assumes a neutral meaning, as it can greatly shape the cognitive faculties in both a positive and a negative direction (M § 650)¹³. The point will then be to develop the customary virtues (*virtutes consuetudinariae*) in a positive manner (E § 242).

To lend foundation to the theme of *habitus* and *consuetudo*, Baumgarten appeals to Leibniz. As is well known, Leibniz had admitted the existence of «tiny perceptions» (see Otabe [2010]), which lie below the threshold of consciousness. Tiny perceptions make it possible not only to explain the knowledge of things that are singularly imperceptible (such as the sea waves lapping the shore), but also the power of habits, which are acquired through a series of repeated actions to which we do not individually pay attention. Although according to Leibniz it is impossible to directly guide the development of habits, it is, however, possible to act on them indirectly, for example, countering a habit by setting an opposite habit against it (Leibniz [1710]: 137¹⁴).

In Baumgarten's perspective, this means that we must obscure the distinct representations we want to acquire through their reiteration, and thus plunge them deeper and deeper into the ground of the soul, until a certain virtue becomes «a kind of second nature» (E § 242; see Nannini [2021])¹⁵. To this end, we must make sure that the representations absorbed into the ground of the soul, the source of desires, are aimed at the beautiful (K § 54). Aesthetic exercises will thus enable the functionalization of tiny perceptions by giving them an order and a shape as habits of beauty¹⁶. In this way, Baumgarten can provide his aesthetic hexiology with a psychological basis¹⁷.

Baumgarten suggests two basic types of exercises in the *Aesthetica*: one concerning the individual lower cognitive faculties, so that their good natural disposition may be strengthened, as explained in ethics and in the various sections of empirical psychology – a discipline that for Wolff was already intended to describe as well as to develop and train the faculties of the soul (Wolff [1732]: *Praefatio*, 17*; on *habitus* in Wolff, see Park [2004]); the other concerns the collaboration of the various faculties, cognitive and appetitive, in thinking beautifully about a certain subject: these are properly called «aesthetic exercises» (AE §§ 47-51). One of Baumgarten's examples is that of a painter, who often uses his paintbrush to make something beautiful (K § 47). As apparent, the *habitus* resulting from the customary activity of the painter is

not a mere mindless iteration of one and the same action, but the ability to react to circumstances appropriately, according to an open set of actions of which *habitus* represents the dynamic pattern.

In the classification of aesthetic exercises, presented according to a progressive target age (see Krupp [2006]), Baumgarten starts from the exercises based on the almost innate instinct to imitation and expectation of similar cases; in fact, Baumgarten argues, a wit with an inborn disposition to beauty tends to exercise itself even without the guidance of theory, as when «the child talks, while playing, especially if he is the inventor of the games or the little commander among his companions, and devotes himself to them with earnest effort, and does and endures much, while looking, while listening, while reading things that he can understand in a beautiful way» (AE § 55).

As the years go by, to these childhood exercises it is necessary to add the theoretical study of aesthetics. This study is presented in the section on the discipline of aesthetics, where the increase in the generality of the rules will lead the *pulchre cogitaturus* from the individual liberal arts to the aesthetic art, which Baumgarten ultimately intends to establish as a science, providing it with universal and certain principles (AE §§ 62-77). This investigation must in any case be also accompanied by exercises, since rules without exercise do not provide the expected benefit (AE § 77). Such exercises are undoubtedly more complex than early childhood improvisations, but just as important for thinking beautifully. Only if both types of exercises join forces, the practitioner will succeed in developing beauty as *habitus pulchre cogitandi*, which involves together the cognitive faculties (*ingenium*), the appetitive faculties (*indoles*) and the body (*temperamentum*) (AE § 59). At the end of this process, then, aesthetics will no longer be just a theoretical collection of rules about beauty – an external art to use Timpler's words – but rather the practical ἐξίς of those rules, which must constitute the common ground for the practitioners of all the liberal arts¹⁸.

Hexiologia aethetica

After elucidating the genealogy and systematic role of *habitus* in the origin of disciplinary aesthetics, it is necessary to flesh out the specific kind of aesthetic *habitus* which Baumgarten discusses. For assuming that nature is to be amended through exercise and theoretical study, what are the directions in which these tools should lead us in order to think beautifully? What, in short, are the rules of Baumgarten's method?

From the very first paragraphs of the *Aesthetica*, Baumgarten names six perfections of sensible knowledge: «Wealth, greatness, truth, clarity, certainty and life of knowledge [...] give the perfection of all knowledge» (AE § 22; on the

genealogy of the list, see Nannini [2020]). In contrast, «poverty (*angustiae*), worthlessness (*vilitas*), falsehood (*falsitas*), obscurity (*obscuritas*), wavering (*dubia fluctuatio*), inertia (*inertia*), constitute the elements of imperfection of all knowledge. As phenomenal objects, they sully sensible knowledge in general, and are the main vices of things and thoughts» (AE § 23). The proposal I advance is to consider the six perfections of knowledge not simply as aesthetic categories, but also as goals of specific ascetic pathways aimed at developing the respective *habitus*¹⁹. So far Baumgarten scholars, when not entirely disdainful of the structural role of the perfections (for a rectification see Tedesco [2008]: 139-140), have seen in such elements a legacy of rhetoric or a canon of epistemic excellence. Already the fact that their antonyms are regarded as vices suggests in any case that these categories might be more properly understood as intellectual virtues, or rather their counterparts on the aesthetic level – aesthetic virtues²⁰.

In his *Elementa philosophiae instrumentalis* (1703), Johann Franz Buddeus (1667-1729), a Lutheran theologian and philosopher close to Pietism and certainly known to Baumgarten (see Grote [2017]: 142), had distinguished the vices and virtues of the intellect in all its workings and faculties, starting from its state of weakness (*imbecillitas*) due to the Fall. While the vices (see Kivistö [2014]: 19-21), including *ignorantia*, *angustia cognitionis*, *obscuritas*, *error seu falsitas*, *dubitatio*, etc., are for Buddeus «morbi intellectus», the epistemic virtues (such as truth, clarity and efficacy or life) constitute the health of the intellect, making it fit to acquire true and sound erudition (Buddeus [1703]: 120-135). As patent, the list of epistemic vices and virtues is not very dissimilar to that of Baumgarten, who probably used it as one of his sources (see Nannini [2020]: 481).

Whereas Buddeus merely speaks of the intellect, though, Baumgarten extends the doctrine to the plane of αἴσθησις. In Baumgarten, the six perfections thus constitute the poles of beauty as εὐαισθησία, of beauty as the wisdom of αἴσθησις. Such wisdom partially remedies the malady corrupting sensibility after the Fall, thereby making its own contribution to the restoration of the image of God in us (cf. K § 12). It is to this wisdom that aesthetics intends to guide the readers, so that they may finally achieve the *habitus pulchre cogitandi* in their own life.

This process of habituation was very apparent in Descartes's method: «[A]s I practiced the method I felt my mind gradually become accustomed to conceiving its objects more clearly and distinctly» (AT, VI, 21; CSM, I, 121; see Davies [2001]; D'Agostino [2017]: part 2). Albeit addressing the use of sensibility rather than the use of reason, Baumgarten's method, too, has as its primary purpose to change the diet of the mind to healthier habits, internalizing the λόγοι, the categories of aesthetics, into an ἥθος, a habitual character, that guides us spontaneously from within.

It is no coincidence that in the sections devoted to each of the six perfections Baumgarten does not merely explain them as perfections of knowledge in the abstract, but also mentions possible exercises that can lead the reader or listener of his lectures to appropriately train and habituate their sensible thinking in that direction, thus increasing the subject's aesthetic agency. Not only that, but, again like Descartes (AT, VI, 18), Baumgarten brings to the fore a kind of meta-rule that comes ahead of the actual treatment of the rules of thought he intends to propose: that is, the observance without exception of the rules themselves, their constant exercise. «Nulla dies sine linea» (no day without a line), Baumgarten asserts with the words which Pliny the Elder had applied to the Greek painter Apelles (AE § 77; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, 35, 87).

As for the concrete methodological precepts, Baumgarten begins with the richness of sensible thinking. The beautiful mind must conduct experiments to decide whether the subject matter is rich enough before taking it up as the theme of its own thought: for this purpose, it will be able to make use of two specific arts: first, the art of analogy, whereby something similar can be derived from a beautiful thing already known, as in the case of mature imitation or parody; second, topics, the art of recalling to memory the predicates of a certain subject (AE §§ 129-130)²¹. Here, it is useful to train oneself with universal topics (AE § 137), for example, analyzing a certain subject based on the famous line: «Who? With what aid? What? How? Why? Where? When?» (AE § 133) or Aristotle's ten categories. While exercises with universal topics give only common predicates, like a kind of standard clothes that should fit all human beings, more useful will be the exercises with special topics, as they are more appropriate to the individuality of the things with which aesthetics is concerned (K §§ 137-138). As examples, Baumgarten outlines two specifically aesthetic topics that can serve as an exercise in the richness of beautiful thinking: the first is an artificial topics, in which the beautiful spirit must ask whether the chosen theme can be profitably thought according to the six perfections mentioned in the opening of the treatise. The second is a psychological topic (AE § 140; K § 140), in which the beautiful mind must check whether all the lower faculties are adequately involved in thinking sensibly about a certain theme (AE § 140).

Exercises are also important for the acquisition of the second perfection of thought, greatness, in particular the subjective greatness of the mind (AE § 59; see Mirbach [2008]); in fact, only by assiduously attending to what is noble and beautiful will one learn to think and desire nobly and beautifully (K § 45). In this case, it is necessary to support with steady exercise and discipline the inborn inclination to *magnanimitas*, the tension of the appetitive faculties of the soul toward what is great (AE §§ 44-45; K §§ 44-45; AE § 352; § 354), though without reaching the severity of the Stoics (K § 353), so as to make honorableness and nobility a second nature («altera natura», AE § 363)²².

The same need for habituation is also crucial for truth. The *studium veritatis* does not only require a wit naturally suited to the task of thinking subjectively about truth, but also «a wit exercised with great effort and accustomed to investigate aesthetico-logical truths thoroughly; and not just any propensity is understood, but the firm purpose on the part of the mind to infer from its reflections the maximum of truth which [...] they can admit» (AE § 555). Once again, Baumgarten emphasizes the meta-rule of constant endeavor and zealous diligence, here by means of exercises that foster the acquisition of consequential and contradiction-free thinking (K § 555). The importance of ἄσκησις also applies to the two perfections discussed in the second volume of the *Aesthetica* (1758): in the case of aesthetic light, it is necessary to acquire the *habitus* that enables one to discern the splendor of thoughts from false embellishment (AE §§ 628; 712); in the case of certainty, it is necessary to develop the *habitus* to persuade in a verisimilar way, without indulging in falsehood (AE §§ 838-839).

Perhaps the most significant element of the second volume in this respect, however, is already in the preface. In this very brief text, in which Baumgarten explains the health issues that led him to leave the *Aesthetica* unfinished, and lacking even the section on life, the sixth and supreme beauty of knowledge, Baumgarten addresses the faithful reader who has followed him so far: «[Reader friend, learn] from me, who for eight years now have been wandering in a labyrinth of illnesses from which there seems to be no escape, how necessary it is to accustom oneself in time to think well of the best things (*maturius bene cogitandis optimis assueferi*). What I would do in my condition, indeed, if I were for my part incapable of doing this, I certainly do not know» (AE: 241). With this final admonition, tested in the crucible of affliction, Baumgarten confirms that the practical acquisition of the *habitus* of «bene cogitare» is the ultimate end of his aesthetics. The goal of the treatise *Aesthetica*, Baumgarten thus suggests, is precisely to help the reader achieve in his or her own existence that *assuefactio* to good thinking that for Baumgarten proves so decisive precisely at the most difficult moment of his existence. Baumgarten thus brings his own life (and death) as evidence in favor of the soundness of his work.

From habitus to habitat

Forming the *habitus* of thinking beautifully, however, still does not mean thinking beautifully. In fact, based on the Aristotelian distinction between ἕξις and ἐνέργεια (*Eudemian Ethics* 1218b; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098b33), *habitus* is just a potential matrix and not yet its actualization. According to Baumgarten, aesthetic impetus or inspiration is required for the actualization of beautiful thinking (AE §§ 78-95). Inspiration is understood here as the advent of some-

thing we perceive as radically other to ourselves, which, however, at the same time resonates in the subject's innermost being, raising the degree of its powers in a sudden and unexpected manner. Traditionally, this advent is explained by the doctrine of ἐνθουσιασμός, the coming of the god in us: «The god, here is the god!», exclaimed the Cumaean Sibyl when Apollo took possession of her (AE § 82). Yet, Baumgarten maintains, the visitation of such otherness – the «breathing into oneself of something greater» (AE § 80) – might be more correctly explained as the abrupt clarification of forgotten, unnoticed, and unforeseen perceptual threads which are usually dormant in the ground of the soul (AE § 80).

As we have observed above, the acquisition of *habitus* functionalizes the tiny perceptions into identity patterns sedimented in the *fundus animae* as a second nature; however, these perceptions are never fully under our control, as they bear trace to our obscure relations to the whole universe²³. Of such relationships we become especially conscious precisely during inspiration, when these perceptions suddenly awaken from their habitual slumber in unpredicted ways and times owing to our point of view, hence to the position (or posture) of our body in the environment. While *habitus* provide a sort of self-made armor, a παρασκευή²⁴, that makes it possible to give a temporarily stable identity, an ἦθος, to the aesthetic subject, the aesthetic subject will be such, that is, effective in thinking beautifully, only when that identity is shaken by the renewed awareness of the nexus of which it is part. The otherness we sense in inspiration, the god visiting us, is precisely the experience of the e-vent, of that which comes from outside, causing us to feel the connections that run through our self with utmost intensity. In that moment we no longer deal with the object of our sensible thought as something isolated or separated from us, but perceive ourselves as entangled within the same web of relations (cf. M § 357: «in mundo non datur insula»; M § 544), as open-ended poles of that very network. It is in the successful convergence of *habitus* and *habitat*, ἔξις and τόχη that the aesthetic act is finally accomplished.

From this standpoint, the distance between the Stoic sage and the aesthetic sage comes into the open. As portrayed in the frontispiece of Wolff's *Deutsche Ethik* (1720), the Stoic-like sage is identified with a rocky outcrop above the stormy clouds and winds – what Aristotle called the πάθη of the atmosphere (*Meteorologica*, 371a). Baumgarten, as is well known, takes issue with this image in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (K § 7), since the philosopher is «homo inter homines» (AE § 7) and errs if he considers his own sensible faculties, hence also his affects or πάθη, foreign to himself. Along with this anthropological reading, an ecological interpretation is also possible. While the Stoic sage trains himself to erect an impenetrable barrier to external factors, taking abode in a «semper in-nubilus aether» (Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, 3, 21), a supralunar sphere devoid of atmosphere (Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, LIX)²⁵, the aesthetic sage is aware of being

continually pervaded by the environment: «The ether is purer, but here we must breathe air», maintains Baumgarten in the *Ethica philosophica* (E § 246).

In such allegiance to aerobic breathing, aesthetic *in-spiratio* can reveal its ecological significance, insofar as it captures the feeling of interconnectedness which the beautiful mind senses through its bodily immersion in the environment. The equipment, the *παρασκευή*, of the aesthete as «an athlete of the event»²⁶ thus does not take the shape of an impermeable shield, but is more like a sail, capable of making the most of the sudden blast of propitious zephyrs (AE § 141). Rather than a vertical ascesis toward the acropolis of wisdom, the beauty which aesthetics aims at is the fruit of a constitutively intramundane ascesis, where aesthetic *habitus* do not immunize from the *πάθη* of the habitat, but prepare to take advantage of their never entirely predictable advent as a factor of creativity and vivification.

Conclusion

Looking at the rise of disciplinary aesthetics *sub specie ascetica* allows us to cast new light upon the rise of the aesthetic subject. In fact, nascent aesthetics reveals a number of neglected relationships with the noetization of metaphysics and the resumption of the theme of *habitus* and intellectual virtues in the scholastic discussion of the early modern period, where hexiology becomes a full-fledged discipline. As I have suggested, one of the foundational elements of aesthetics is precisely the attempt to delineate and internalize a hexiology of sensible thinking. Rather than marking a merely epistemological revolution based on the emancipation of sensibility, disciplinary aesthetics in its inception thus outlines a practical itinerary of self-reformation that leads to an enduring redirection of one's existence.

From this point of view, the six perfections of sensible knowledge listed by Baumgarten do not come down to a sheer canon of aesthetic categories, but rather amount to methodological guidelines, that is, directions of habituation of sensible thinking. To properly assimilate the doctrine of aesthetic richness, then, it is not enough to study the relevant chapter of the *Aesthetica*, but it will be necessary to carry out the suggested exercises, so as to develop the *ἔξις* of thinking richly; likewise, nobility has to become the *ἔξις* of thinking primarily about noble themes; truth, the *ἔξις* of thinking constantly about verisimilar events; and so on. As is evident, in the transition from systematic categories to imbibed *ἔξις*, the perfections cease to be nouns and become adverbs (*ars pulchre cogitandi*), hence modes of being. In this adverbial perspective, beauty is not to be understood as an object we look at from a distance or a momentary feeling, but a quality of our making, or better, something we become.

By means of the training of one's inborn sensible dispositions through drills and theoretical study, the beginner (*pulchre cogitaturus*) will thus be able to forge a kind of *παρασκευή*, an armor or, better, an equipment, composed of a set of *habitus* providing matrices of action to behave appropriately when required. While such a *παρασκευή* makes it possible to mold into identity patterns the crawling otherness inhabiting the aesthetic subject, it will never become so impenetrable as to immunize toward the environment from which the subject itself emerges. Precisely the immersion of the subject in the infinity of relations that tie it to the entire universe underlies that *inspiratio* where the potentiality of *habitus* can actualize itself into concrete acts of beautiful thinking, thus turning the *pulchre cogitaturus* into a *pulchre cogitans*. It is in this delicate balance between a formative and an immersive instance that the aesthetic subject makes its debut on the philosophical stage.

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Notes

- 1 «Proinde nos latius extendimus rem in Metaphysica consideratam, ut sub ea πᾶν νοητόν, hoc est Omne intelligibile comprehendatur» (Timpler [1606b]: 7). For the context, see Wundt (1939); Funke (1961); Courtine (1990).
- 2 «[Gnostologia] exhibens Cognoscibilis, qua talis Naturam, Principia, Affectiones, & species. Hoc est Modum apprehendendi quodcumque Objectum, cui innititur omnis humana cognitio» (Calov [1650]: 1). As for the definition, Calov declares: «Gnostologia est habitus mentis principalis, contemplans cognoscibilis, qua tale». See Sgarbi (2018).
- 3 «Cum omnis habitus sit qualitas permanens, per quam ens facile & promptum redditur ad operandum, posset quis inde concludere, omnem habitum perficere subiectum, cui inest. Verum distinguendum est inter habitum bonum & malum: quorum ille dicitur virtus; hic vitium».
- 4 «[M]elius est definire virtutem intellectualem, quod sit habitus intellectualis, per quem homo perficitur & disponitur ad bene cognoscendum verum & falsum».
- 5 «[S]equitur ars liberalis interna, quae nihil aliud est, quam habitus intellectualis hominem perficiens, doctumque & aptum reddens ad artificiose contemplandum vel operandum».
- 6 «Hic numerus [seven, the number of the liberal arts] etiam convenit cum imperfectione hominis ut est homo, quam sanare debet philosophia: quae ob id Platoni dicitur medicina sanans morbos animi. Nam philosophia theoretica tollit caliginem ignorantiae, quae est in intellectu theoretico; practica malitiam, quae est in voluntate; poëtica inertiam, quae conspicitur in intellectu poëtico».
- 7 «[C]uilibet manifestum est, ad comparandum etiam liberalem artem internam, quae est species habitus intellectualis, necessario tria illa requiri, nempe naturam, doctrinam & exercitationem [...]. Ex quib. natura & doctrina a quibusdam dicuntur causae remotae habitus; exercitatio vero causa efficiens proxima».
- 8 Gnoseology, one of Baumgarten's several neologisms, is defined as «the science of knowledge in general», dealing as much with sensible knowledge as with intellectual knowledge; in this sense, gnoseology is synonymous with logic in the broad sense, including logic in the strict sense and aesthetics, and constitutes the main part of organic or instrumental philosophy (SC § 25), devoted to the refinement of the entire cognitive faculty (K § 1). While gnostology, as a propaedeutic to metaphysics, is a contemplative discipline, gnoseology, as logic, is an operative discipline. From the point of view of gnoseology, we might argue, there are two ways of considering a possible object of knowledge that gnostology studies theoretically, one κατ' αἴσθησιν and one κατὰ νόησιν; both must be operationally directed to the respective perfection.
- 9 As is known, for Baumgarten αἴσθησις refers to the cognition resulting from all the lower powers of the soul, not only from the senses (see already Baumgarten [1735]: § 116).
- 10 «Aesthetices finis est perfectio cognitionis sensitivae, qua talis. Haec autem est pulcritudo».
- 11 «Pulcritudo rerum et cogitationum distinguenda est a pulcritudine cognitionis, cuius prima et primaria pars est, et pulcritudine obiectorum et materiae, quacum ob receptum rei significatum saepe, sed male confunditur. Possunt turpia pulcre cogitari, ut talia, et pulciora turpiter».
- 12 «Ad characterem felicitis aethetici requiritur II) Ἀσκησις et exercitatio aethetica, crebrior repetitio actionum in hoc homogearum, ut sit aliquis ingenii ac indolis, §§ 28-46 descriptorum consensus in datum thema, s. ne quis ab Orbilis data themata cogitet, in unum cogitandum, in rem unam, ut habitus pulcre cogitandi sensim acquiratur».
- 13 *Consuetudo* is discussed by Wolff in the section on the will of his *Psychologia empirica*, while Baumgarten deals with it in the section on reason, hence in relation to the cognitive dimension of the soul. In Baumgarten *consuetudo* is thus subject to the domain of *analogon rationis*, which confusedly perceives the nexus of things (M § 640).
- 14 «Elle [l'âme] a cependant quelque pouvoir encor sur ces perceptions confuses, bien que d'une manière indirecte; car quoiqu'elle ne puisse changer ses passions sur le champ, elle peut y travailler de loin avec assez de succès, et se donner des passions nouvelles, et même des habitudes».

- 15 According to Baumgarten, *virtus* is in general «habitus, sibi factu quod sit optimum, libere faciendi» (Baumgarten [1763]: § 41).
- 16 The link between ascesis and *habitus* is also evident in the field of logic. Baumgarten devotes the last, very short chapter of his *Acroasis logica* (1761) to *Ascetica, seu de acquirendo habitu in logices applicatione* (Baumgarten [1761]: 208), in which he recommends practice for each section of his logic. The chapter comments on § 5 of ch. 16 of Wolff's *Deutsche Logik* («Wie man eine Fertigkeit in der Ausübung der Logick erhalten soll»), inserted in the fifth edition of 1727. See Schwaiger (2017): 182-183.
- 17 The psychologization of the sciences as *habitus*, as suggested above, was already in place in Timpler (see Schmidt-Biggemann [1983]: 83 and 85).
- 18 Aesthetics is therefore a theory of the liberal arts, a *technologia* to use Timpler's word, as well as an art in itself (both internal and external). In Baumgarten, however, the liberal arts are closer to Batteux's system of the fine arts than to Timpler's list. On the relation between aesthetics and the liberal arts, see Hernández Márcos (2003): 109-121. On the importance of *habitus* for the German concept of «schöne Wissenschaften» (belles-lettres), see Strube (1990): 139-141.
- 19 According to Baumgarten, the six categories are objects of care (*curae*) for a subject (*subiectum*) who intends to think of an object (*obiectum*) in a beautiful way (AE § 115). This does not mean that the categories cannot also be applied to the object of thought, see for example AE §§ 118; 189 (in this case, they should act as criteria for the choice of the theme of our thinking).
- 20 With regard to *perfectio intellectus*, Wolff distinguishes the material, object-related intellectual virtues (the traditional five Aristotelian intellectual virtues) from the formal intellectual virtues, which concern only the cognitive process (such as *soliditas*) (Wolff [1750]: § 143; see Dioni [2015]); if we borrow this distinction, we might say that the virtues we analyze here are a kind of formal virtues of sensibility.
- 21 It should be emphasized that for Baumgarten the use of topics is commendable only as a preparatory exercise and not for the act of thinking beautifully itself. For the difference between topics as «ars in memoriam revocandi» and heuristics, see Schwaiger (2017): 192-196. For the wider context, see Buchenau (2013).
- 22 The relevant exercises are set out in the *Ethica philosophica* which I cannot discuss here.
- 23 On the basis of the universal *nexus rerum*, the soul thinks in every moment of the whole universe; however, since the soul thinks of it according to the position of the body, the vast majority of its representations remain obscure and therefore unconscious (M §§ 512-514; 741-743; see Nannini [2022]: 106).
- 24 On the importance of *παρασκευή* as the equipment for handling future events in ancient philosophy, see Foucault (1982): 320-327.
- 25 «Talis est Sapientis animus, qualis mundi status super Lunam. Semper illic serenum est».
- 26 «The Stoic athlete, the athlete of ancient spirituality also has to struggle. He has to be ready for a struggle in which his adversary is anything coming to him from the external world: the event. The ancient athlete is an athlete of the event» (Foucault [1982]: 322).