

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN



REGULÆ II

Regulæ II

On Beauty

by

Wim van den Dungen

Regulæ II

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en hommage à René Descartes

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Gasp, Glow, and Afterglow

Preface

Regulae is a three-volume project mapping the rules of truth, beauty, and action as distinct but coordinated normative disciplines. Volume I established the architectonic and method in their strictest, most formal register. It secures the non-ontological, reflexive grounds of knowing — a principled, rule-bound practice anchored in the *factum rationis* — and hands Vol. II, relaxing toward aesthetic normativity, a ready-made scaffold (ingress/objects/logic/egress) for building a parallel, expectant normative account of beauty (given the conditions, beauty ought to be expected to be shared with others). Volume III will address action and identify the best action as love understood as planetary participationism.

Vol. I's 'armed truce' of subject and object grounds truth's *necessity*. Vol. II reuses the same architectonic but with a relaxation appropriate to beauty : from *fact of reason* to *fact of feeling*, from closed, hard observation to an open, soft gaze, meeting beauty as pleasure up to exemplary assent, from a few loose principles to maxims that expect agreement at the level of form of harmonization, organized by immanent metaphysical hyper-concepts of creative thought. This sets the doctrine of *relative* necessity across the trilogy, for the normative take returns in Vol. III.

Reasons for the Recap

Here is how the recap of *Regulae I* directly serves *Regulae II* — and how the *degree* of normativity shifts from truth to beauty.

- First, *architectonic continuity*. The Vol. I scaffold — ingress → objects → logic → egress — lets Vol. II reuse the same argumentative choreography. Where Vol. I begins from the *fact of reason* and reflexively identifies principles for truth, Vol. II starts from the *fact of feeling* and derives principles for beauty. The identical staging prevents a slide into psychologism or mere sociology of taste ; readers see at once that aesthetics is foremost handled as a *normative discipline* with its own first fact, objects, logic, and egress.
- Second, *the dyad and the performative check*. Vol. I's 'armed truce' of subject and object equips Vol. II with a clean way to state its own dyad — aesthetic attitude and aesthetic properties — and to show why denying either pole produces a performative snag. The recap reminds that the argument's force comes from the conditions of theory and practice of knowledge itself, not from ontological fiat. The performative contradiction plays an important role in this.
- Third, *registers and markers*. Vol. I trains the ear for phrases like 'cannot be coherently denied,' 'under critical conditions,' and 'we must suppose.' Recalling these markers before entering Vol. II helps the reader understand that claims about excellence and exemplarity are *not* expressions of personal preference but instead

rules governing how one should judge under a properly prepared aesthetic attitude that meets beauty, thanks to the appearance of objects that bring this about.

Fourth, *stringency management*. Vol. I formalizes the three-tier descent — principles → norms → maxims — and names the controlled loss of stringency as one moves from transcendental to applied registers. Vol. II requires a similar descent to justify the teaching of soft observation as a method rooted in neurophilosophical considerations of embodiment, the formation of excellence as mid-tier norms, and the application of speculative hyper-concepts.

Fifth, *the non-ontological guardrail*. The recap makes explicit that normativity is not grounded in a metaphysical system. That guardrail lets Vol. II safely present process-ontology as a compatible backdrop rather than a source of aesthetic obligation ; beauty's rules remain internal to the intersubjective process of judging taste (itself grounded in the *fact of feeling*), not imported from a theory of being.

Because the neurophilosophical motifs and the tripartite temporal hubs belong to this mid and lower tier, their empirical articulation is expected to age faster than the underlying architectonic. Future work in neuroscience or psychology may well redraw the preferred segmentation of aesthetic episodes or revise the mapping between *gasp*, *glow*, and *afterglow* and specific neural or physiological profiles. Should this occur, only the applied and mid-tier layers would require adjustment : the principles and norms of aesthetic judgment, and the maxims of training proposed here, can be translated into a new empirical idiom without being abandoned, for they answer to the *fact of feeling* and to the intersubjective practice of judging beauty rather than to any single frontier model of the brain.

Previously in Vol. I — On Truth

Architectonic : principles → norms → maxims

Regula I organizes epistemology across three tiers that downgrade stringency from head to tail. Transcendental logic states the *a priori* principles that cannot be coherently denied without triggering a performative contradiction.

Theoretical epistemology recasts these as norms governing valid knowledge or truth claims. Applied epistemology supplies maxims for the production of knowledge in concrete research cells, where opportunism and *a posteriori* constraints inevitably enter. Each tier has Ingress : an entry fact ; Objects : its terms ; Logic : the argumentative link ; Egress : the result.

- Transcendental Logic | The Principles

Ingress : the *fact of reason* (*factum rationis*) ;

Objects : the transcendental subject and the transcendental object ;

Logic : avoid the performative contradiction arising when either pole is denied ;

Egress : the principles of conceptual knowledge.

The subject/object dyad is an armed truce ; reducing the object to the subject (idealism) or the subject to the object (realism) collapses the possibility, theory, and practice of knowing into incoherence. Formally, the system presupposes the classical laws of logic : identity, non-contradiction, and excluded third ; within that frame, the *factum rationis* is necessary and cannot, just like the principle of non-contradiction, be denied without using it.

- Theoretical Epistemology | The Norms

Ingress : principles just stated ;

Objects : object and subject of knowledge, validity, categories, and ideas ;

Logic : from principles to norms that govern experimentation and discourse ;

Egress : norms for valid conceptual knowledge.

Distinguish between science (testable and arguable) and immanent metaphysics (only arguable) without ontologizing epistemology (letting ontology say what knowledge is). The validity of empirico-formal propositions, in other words, their truth, is regulated by the ideas of the real (correspondence) and the ideal (consensus) within the community of sign-interpreters. The register is explicitly normative rather than descriptive ; the work polices naturalistic fallacies and warns against grounding norms in ontology.

- Applied Epistemology | The Maxims

Ingress : theoretical norms under real-world constraints ;

Objects : communication, *a posteriori* judgments, optimization, fact production ;

Logic : from norms to maxims of ‘good’ practice amid context, interest, power, and money ;

Egress : maxims that guide the research cell.

Necessity is explicitly lowered to account for context dependence and the messy, opportunistic realities of knowledge production, without abandoning the higher-tier norms that still guide practice. This process is not straightforward but relies on *a posteriori* justifications, which depend on intersubjective factors such as preferences, biases, personal likings, and others (like a ‘good sex life’ to paraphrase Feyerabend). *Regulæ I* maintains a sharp line between descriptive claims and normative analysis. Phrases like ‘cannot be coherently denied,’ ‘under critical conditions,’ and ‘we must suppose’ signal the normative register.

Degree of Normativity

Source-fact. In Vol. I, the ingress is the *fact of reason* ; its necessity is strict because any denial presupposes the very capacities it would negate. In Vol. II, the ingress is the *fact of feeling* ; it is likewise necessary for aesthetic practice, but the *mode* of necessity is softer because it concerns how appearances must be taken up to be judgeable as beautiful, not how propositions must be formed to be true.

Target of assent. In Vol. I, the ‘ought,’ aims at truth-apt content under critical conditions ; assent is *compulsory* when the grounds are met. In Vol. II, the ought aims at excellence and the exemplary form of harmonization in appearances ; assent is prescriptive as excellence and exemplarity—one expects agreement from competent judges prepared by the method and able to judge aesthetic value—, but the demand does not rise to an *imperative* over private and intersubjective preference.

Strength of obligation. Vol. I operates at *maximal stringency* in its transcendental tier ; contradictions are fatal. Vol. II operates with *moderate strictness* ; contradictions still matter, but they appear as failures in pleasurableness, enjoyability, presentation, misreadings of affordances, or misapplications of harmonization keys rather than as clear violations of logic.

Justificatory route. In Vol. I, deduction of principles is categorical — if you practice knowing at all, you are *bound* by these rules. Vol. II’s deduction of taste observes excellence and the exemplary. Suppose you practice aesthetic judging well under the trained aesthetic attitude. In that case, one may *expect others to acknowledge* excellence in the display of aesthetic value and exemplarity, i.e., when a work exemplifies a key to harmonization. The binding force is real, yet the route to it passes through cultivation and the pointing out of exemplarity rather than through categorical necessity.

Mode of failure. In Vol. I, failure is incoherence (contradiction) or invalid inference ; correction is evidential (test) and logical (argument). In Vol. II, failure is haste in naming, a hard observation, the mirage of natural faith, insensitivity to salient form, or category mistakes about ontology, displacing disharmony and misreading the sublime ; correction is methodological and hermeneutic, slow the naming, refine the attention, re-test the form.

Community test. In Vol. I, the critical community of relevant sign-interpreters, adjudicate truth by standards of validity (evidence) and good arguments (well-formed theories enabling falsification). In Vol. II, the competent art community adjudicates taste by standards of aesthetic value and harmonization under soft observation ; the expectation of assent is tied to preparedness and to the shared, direct experience and practice, not to merely counting sentimental preferences.

Net effect. Vol. I secures a strict normative core for knowing the truth. Vol. II secures a *relaxed* but *binding* normative core for judging beauty. Both are non-ontological and transcendental in scope. The necessity invoked by Vol. I is categorical with respect to truth, whereas Vol. II’s necessity is relaxed concerning beauty.

Vol. II is not lowering philosophy’s bar ; it is calibrating it to the distinctive object of aesthetics, where open observation and attention meet aesthetic properties of objects that make the prescriptive, expectant judgment of taste possible, and where the ‘ought’ remains genuine though its degree is proportioned to the nature of the normative domain involved, namely strict and tense in the case of truth and

its objective claims, and lenient and relaxed in the case of beauty and its intersubjectivity. Moreover, in aesthetics, the judgment of exemplarity calls for immanent metaphysics (hyper-concepts) and a transpersonal, holotropic, creative mode of cognition (creative thought) that was dubbed ‘hypothetical’ in *Regulae I*.

Thought - Feeling - Action

The trilogy systematically aligns with three key aspects of human psychology in a systematic way : *thought*, as explored in Vol. I, *feeling* in Vol. II, *action* in Vol. III. Each volume provides a clear entry point, identifies its specific subjects, offers rules that govern that domain, and concludes with a logic appropriate to practice. The goal is not to rank faculties but to establish their *proper conditions for correct use*, ensuring that thinking thinks well, feeling feels well, and acting acts well.

Thought corresponds to *Regulae I* : it enters by the *fact of reason* and stabilizes the ‘armed truce’ of subject and object. Its obligation is categorical because any denial exploits what it denies. The norms that follow regulate concept formation, truth-claims, and inference under critical conditions.

In psychological terms, this volume disciplines the *cognitive* aggregate : it teaches how to withhold assertions until experiments confirm ; how to repair dissensus ; and how to integrate facts, correspondence, consensus, and coherence without sliding into the metaphysics of subjectivism (idealism, psychologism, mentalism) or objectivism (realism, materialism, scientism, physicalism).

Feeling corresponds to *Regulae II* : it enters through the *fact of feeling* and stabilizes the meeting of aesthetic attitude with aesthetic properties. Its obligation is about excellent aesthetic value, exemplarity, and is prescriptive (expectantly) rather than imperative. The norms that follow regulate observation, presentation (pleasure, satisfaction, exquisiteness), excellence, exemplarity, and the conjuring of the sublime (by integrating disharmony). In psychological terms, this volume disciplines the *affective* aggregate : it softens premature naming ; heightens sensitivity to rhythm, proportion, salience, and grain ; and converts liking into accountable judgment through repeatable methods of soft observation.

Action corresponds to *Regulae III* : it will enter by the *fact of action* and stabilize agents (actors), action, and the outcome under constraints.

Here, in ethics, the norms to be developed regulate intention and freedom (of the subject), duty (in relation to others), conscience (moral memory), and vocation (social aim). In psychological terms, this volume will discipline the *conative* aggregate : it translates reasons and feelings into choice and execution ; it equips agents to hold themselves accountable for outcomes without collapsing normativity into utility.

As said, across the three volumes, the *degree* of normativity is calibrated to the object. Vol. I is strictest : contradiction is fatal ; necessity is categorical. Vol. II is relaxed but binding : failures show up as mispresentation, insensitivity, low

aesthetic value, or misapplied keys ; necessity is excellent and exemplary. Vol. III is directive under contingency : failures are misjudgments of risk, feasibility, goodness, justice, or fairness ; necessity is pragmatic and proportioned to accountable action in shared action-domains.

The tensions in the action domains discussed in applied ethics are only resolved at the moral level of love, i.e., through active effort to improve the world for all sentient beings without exception, targeting capitalism and communism, and their nationalist roots, as tools to achieve this. The three aggregates of thought, feeling, and action are not silos ; they couple. Well-formed thought protects feeling from sentimentality and action from rashness. Well-trained feeling corrects thought's myopia by surfacing what appearance affords and tempers action with proportion and measure. Well-governed action returns friction and consequence to both thought and feeling, forcing revision of concepts and recalibration of taste.

The trilogy, therefore, produces a *feedback loop* : critique shapes attention ; attention influences deliberation ; and deliberation feeds tests back to both.

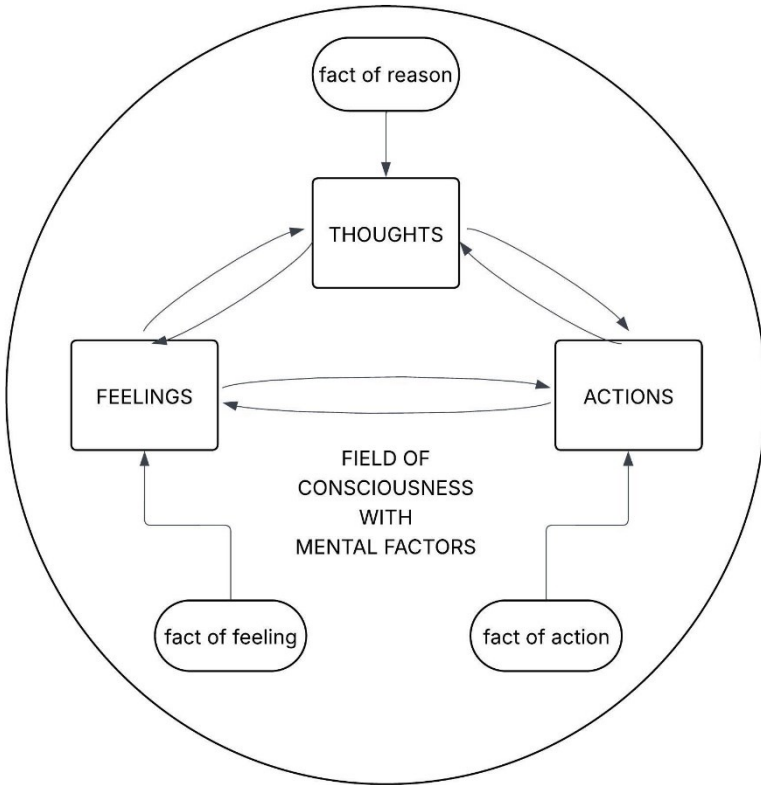
A common temporal rhythm rooted in neurophilosophical considerations flows through them.

In Vol. II, *gasp* → *glow* → *afterglow* is a micro-temporal arc that transforms initial contact into sustained presence and then reflective engagement. It is the core operational arc, in tune with the embodiment of our experience, and links aesthetics to its original intent (Baumgarten) : the study of observation and, in this context, how beauty calls for an *open* observation that does not immediately dampen the *gasp* with reflective activity (*afterglow*). In Vol. I., thought similarly had its counterpart : problem-framing (theory, argumentation), proof or verification (testing), and practical integration in actual research. Action, too, has its counterpart : uptake, commitment, and review (Vol. III).

The aim of the trilogy is both theoretical and pedagogical : each faculty can be trained by cycling through its proper stages, with safeguards against typical failures.

Finally, the series secures non-ontological grounds for all three aggregates while allowing compatible backdrops. Thought remains disciplined by the *fact of reason* ; feeling by the *fact of feeling* ; action by the *fact of action*. None borrows its 'ought' from a theory of being (ontology) ; where immanent metaphysics is introduced, as in Vol. II's use of process-language, it functions as a compatible background picture rather than as the transcendental ground of any norm.

The result is a coordinated psychology of normed faculties : a head that can answer for its claims, a heart that can answer for its taste, and a hand that can answer for what it does.



Referring to D.W. Gotschalk, we wish to define artistic values (and, consequently, also musical values) as : “the adequacy of the object (...) to a telic factor of a subject, i.e., to a requirement, an interest or a need of a person.” These ‘telic factors,’ these requirements, interests, or needs (which we shall call, henceforth, *purposes*) can be of the most differential nature. They can even resemble non-human, purely objective realities, such as the structure of the universe (the *musica mundana*) or abstract systems of numbers (Leibniz). But these realities are, of course, also *human conceptions*.

Broeckx, J.L. : *Contemporary Views on Musical Style and Aesthetics*, 1979, pp.45-56.

Introduction

Truth

Absolute Necessity

In volume I of *Regulæ*, dealing with truth, we explored how knowledge is possible and can be manufactured. This involved a self-critique that *reflexively* revealed what has always been the case for the empirico-formal propositions of science and the speculative statements of immanent metaphysics. This transcendental method unfolded the ‘fact of reason’ as the duality between the transcendental subject and the transcendental object, the logical basis of the subject and object of knowledge. This was not derived from sensory input, but rather is the outcome of reflexively seeking the conditions that define conceptual knowledge.

Three levels were available : transcendental logic (the principles), theoretical epistemology (the norms), and applied epistemology (the maxims).

The foundational level of *Regulæ I* is transcendental logic. It investigates the *necessary* conditions for the possibility of conceptual knowledge. It does *not* begin with ontological assumptions or empirical observations but with *the act of knowing itself*, revealing the principles that *must* be presupposed for conceptual cognition to occur. These principles are *not* derived from experience but are *compulsory prerequisites* of rationality that emerge through *critical reflection*. Central to this is the unveiling of the ‘*factum rationis*’—the inescapable requirement of reason that cannot be grounded in a *prior* justification but in the ‘groundless ground’ (Oger) of conceptual knowledge itself. This phrase brings together two insights : (a) knowledge has *no* ground *outside* itself, and (b) it has *no* ontological foundation and so is without fixed ground. Transcendental logic delineates the *limits* of conceptuality, rejecting the grounding of knowledge in something *outside* it, as in metaphysical idealism or metaphysical realism, with its naive realism or ‘natural faith.’ It does not *describe* how one actually thinks but demarcates how conceptual thought *must* be structured.

On this transcendental footing, theoretical epistemology formalizes the normative grammar of conceptual knowledge. It addresses the question : What qualifies as a legitimate, valid knowledge claim ? In this context, facts are not merely *neutral* observational data ; they *always* appear within a theoretical framework. Valid conceptual knowledge is, therefore, the outcome of rule-bound cognitive acts that meet the criteria of internal logical correctness, factual correspondence, and intersubjective argumentation, leading to consensus. Theoretical epistemology remains normative : it does not *describe* how knowledge can be valid or, in applied epistemology, how the research process produces knowledge, but rather determines what *must* be the case for a claim to qualify as valid conceptual knowledge for the time being (and not merely personal opinion). It identifies the

norms governing valid cognition and the maxims covering knowledge production. Crucial in this context is the *theory-ladenness of observation* and the constructive nature of the subject's cognitive act. The mind cannot be an 'empty slate' (Locke), 'empty bucket' *passively* receiving impressions (Hume), or merely registering 'neutral' sense-data (Carnap), for the sensate objects appearing before it are also the inevitable and irreducible result of *interpretation*.

Janus-faced Facts

Facts are Janus-faced. The *theory-dependent* side looks at the theoretical connotations through which observation occurs, while the *theory-independent* side, so we must (normatively) assume, is turned towards reality as it is (the *noumenon*), and is supposed to be informed by it. Whether this is the case or not cannot be conceptually ascertained but must be implied if knowledge is to be more than merely intra-mental or intersubjective. This necessity is not derived from observation but rooted in the *inevitable logic of the conceptual cognitive act itself*. Facts must be more than intersubjective, for otherwise knowledge is never *about something*, i.e., lacks an actual, extra-mental object of knowledge. This Kantian distinction between how things appear (the phenomena) and how they are (the *noumena*) is the crucial critical divide that conceptuality cannot bridge. This reference to an object of knowledge outside (inter)subjectivity is necessary to bring *objectivity* into the discourse on truth. This contrasts with aesthetics, where no one aims at objectivity but rather at the intersubjective recognition of excellence and exemplariness.

Applied epistemology addresses the *specific contexts* in which knowledge is institutionalized and produced through experiment (correspondence) and argument (consensus). Its unit is the *research cell*, which involves the interplay between theory formation (i.e., the context of discovery) and the context of justification (testing and arguing). While theoretical epistemology outlines the *norms* of validity in the abstract, applied epistemology examines how these rules are applied, challenged, and adapted as practical *maxims*. It explores how normative epistemic criteria are used in actual 'as if' inquiry practices and how rule-based justification unfolds under real-world constraints and opportunism. It is not merely a description of how knowledge arises but rather a critical reconstruction of how rules function as precepts within structured investigative processes. It comes close to the considerations of the sociology of science.

As Vol. I addressed truth, it was composed abstractly and formally, an exercise somewhat suspended in mid-air, sidestepping the analysis of the transcendental ego, the historical contexts surrounding knowledge, the intentionality of the subject of experience, and its embeddedness in facticity. The exposition bypassed these aspects to better convey the purely formal conditions of conceptuality, reason, and rationality, rooted in what can be *reflexively* identified as the *factum rationis*. This stringent approach yielded a relatively inert, overly abstract exposition. The advantages of this were to contribute to a critical epistemology

by highlighting its *normative* character. The rules of truth are stark, stern, formal, and devoid of entertaining metaphysical foundations, historical context, and investigation of (inter)subjective intention. They set aside the *concrete* material, informational, and sentient contexts in which knowledge is generated as much as possible, offering no emancipatory or revolutionary perspectives on knowledge or how the media of power and money influence the creation of conceptual knowledge. The latter is set aside for Vol. III on ethics. While applied epistemology points to justifications *a posteriori* and the opportunistic logic of the research cell, it cannot be said that this has been extensively elaborated. The reasons are obvious : each unit develops its own routines and methodologies. Only when results need to be published to undergo peer review, so the theory can be analyzed and experiments repeated, is a ‘standard’ formulation mandatory.

Beauty

In this Vol. II, dealing with aesthetics, what changes is not that objectivity is abandoned but that it is recast as regulated intersubjectivity. The guiding question becomes : What may we expect when a claim to beauty asks for assent ? An aesthetic judgment is at hand. When beauty is observed, the appreciator seeks confirmation and invites others to share the judgment of taste. Transcendental logic here unfolds the *fact of feeling* and distinguishes between the aesthetic attitude of the appreciator and the aesthetic properties of the work of art observed.

Relative Necessity : Beauty and Action

In Vol.II, which addresses aesthetics, the kind of necessity at stake is loosened relative to that of epistemology. Beauty, unlike truth, manifests first of all in an *intersubjective field* : a community of subjects of experience and their shared observation of aesthetic properties under an actively cultivated aesthetic attitude. The constraints remain real, but they operate as tendencies and exemplars rather than as strict universals. And in ethics, with its identification of four levels of ethical behavior (goodness, justice, fairness, and love) and an overall emphasis on the freedom of the will, necessity is again less strict, though more objective than in aesthetics, due to its *goal-oriented* approach. Epistemology seeks to uncover the conditions of truth, specifically, under which settings an empirico-formal proposition can be deemed valid, that is, objective *pro tem*. A valid statement is thus a sentence that we tend to regard as *objective*, at least temporarily. The set of these sentences constitutes the current scientific paradigm. Aesthetics seeks to identify under which *intersubjective* conditions some observed object can be called beautiful. Finally, ethics determines whether an action is good, just, fair, or loving. Since ethics has a *specific aim*, objectivity plays a crucial role once again. Given that the necessity of freedom is an *a priori* of moral action, this objectivity will involve the material, informational, and sentient barriers that attempt to curtail it. One should not hold back the move towards planetary participation, challenging unkindness with revolutionary zeal.

The Armed Truce of Science

Truth derives its normative stance from the ‘fact of reason,’ namely, the irreducible duality between the subject and the object of knowledge. Unfolding this *factum rationis*, we find the relationship between these fundamental terms to be an ‘armed truce,’ a condition in which both the object and the subject are present yet sufficiently distinct *not* to be reduced to one another. In fact, each time this happens (object to subject or subject of object), a *performative contradiction* occurs. Its presence underscores the absolute necessity with which the principles and norms of truth can be articulated, and this without reference to empirical factors (‘pure’ as Kant would have it), but only rooted in the logical necessity of the principle of non-contradiction and the transcendental structures derived from the transcendental method, the reflexively undelving of the necessary conditions of conceptual knowledge. This abstract rigor is precisely what was needed for understanding truth in terms of criticism.

As explained in Vol. I, the truce between the subject and the object of knowledge is called ‘armed’ because both entertain *different* interests (subjective consensus versus objective correspondence) and procedures (dialogal versus monological). They need to maintain this truce without attempting to reduce or eliminate the other side. There is a tendency to break this armistice, and both sides have the means to do so. The proponents of the object of knowledge may allege that subjectivity is derivative (ontological realism). The subject of knowledge may claim that it constitutes the object (ontological idealism). Both are wrong in making this assertion, as doing so always subreptitiously introduces the other. In a consistent, critical epistemology, both are maintained, but the goal of *absolute* conceptual knowledge or indubitable truth must be relinquished as vain.

Moreover, both are reluctantly bound to each other. The subject is prone to identify a theory with which other sign interpreters can agree ; the object is oriented toward reality and seeks correspondence with it. Both keep their weapons ready to defy the other side. Objectivity attempts to sidestep subjective context, whereas intersubjective consensus prioritizes theoretical argumentation over experimentation. In epistemology, both aspects of the *fact of reason* maintain an *asymmetrical* relationship. Here, the scales of the balance are in *ongoing movement*, and a straight plumb line is rarely provided. When such harmony is struck, it is soon lost. This *dynamic swing* is the motor for scientific knowledge acquisition. The fact that the other side is armed makes it more likely for this side to be prudent not to overstep the mark. Understanding conceptual knowledge—and, in a stricter sense, scientific statements—means realizing their fallibilism. It involves relinquishing the notion of *indubitable* truth and embracing relative, mitigated skepticism. This cannot be otherwise if we establish the theory-ladenness of observation, the fact that we can only speak of the ‘factual’ within a preestablished cognitive framework. Facts never appear independent of the theoretical connotation, and the latter is totally floating in mid-air without experimental confirmation or refutation.

The Unarmed Truce of Beauty

In aesthetics, another ‘fact’ can be reflexively identified : the *fact of feeling*. The observation of beauty is not rooted in thought or action, but in a *specific emotional state* that *reacts* to the beauty observed. Such a reaction can be threefold : attraction, aversion, and neutrality. Feelings always accompany the experience of beauty, and in this case, they are triggered by aesthetic properties perceived through a trained, sustained aesthetic attitude. Hence, the *transcendental logic of aesthetics* unfolds the *fact of feeling* as the irreducible confrontation between an *object of aesthetics* or aesthetic properties and a *subject of aesthetics*, maintaining an aesthetic attitude. Without aesthetic properties, nothing beautiful can be identified through acts of observation. Without the aesthetic attitude, beauty cannot be observed at all. Hence, beauty arises at the *intersection* of both, demonstrating that it is a *relational concept* that brings together two conditions.

The *fact of feeling* unfolds as an ‘unarmed’ truce, as both sides of the equation do not seek objectivity but merely the expectation of intersubjective confirmation of what is deemed beautiful (*What may I expect ?* is the question here). The *ongoing dynamical asymmetry* of the *factum rationis* is replaced by a relentless search for *aesthetic value* and *harmonization through modes of (a)symmetry*.

The relation between beauty, (a)symmetry, and harmony is unproblematic, and the aesthetic properties and aesthetic attitudes do not conflict but share in each other’s presence to allow for an intersection called ‘beautiful.’ As in epistemology, the word ‘truce’ refers to the need *not* to inflate the subject and object of aesthetics (keeping a critical divide), avoiding the reduction of one to the other. Qualifying this truce as ‘unarmed’ merely serves to remind us that aesthetics is not epistemology. The latter has an objective aim, namely the production of valid scientific statements, so the weapons are never far away. Experimenters and theoreticians have opposite aims and distrust one another.

In contrast, in aesthetics, both sides serve the same interests and therefore do not need to engage in conflict. Here, the focus lies *not* on the ongoing movement of the balance’s scales (from experiment to argument and back), but on the plumb line that indicates *when and how both scales are in equilibrium*.

The difference between an ‘armed’ and an ‘unarmed’ truce, and how epistemology and aesthetics handle the ‘scales’ representing the object and subject, is well illustrated by the famous ‘Judgment Scene’ from *The Papyrus of Ani* (*The Book of the Dead*). In the scene, set in the *Hall of the Two Truths*, the deceased, Ani, moves forward for the judgment of his heart, which symbolizes intention, will, and conscious thought.

The idea is that if Ani had lived according to Ma’at, the deified principle of balance, order, and justice, the scale holding his heart (on the left) would perfectly tally with the scale of the principle of balance, symbolized by the ‘feather of Ma’at’ (on the right).

We see Anubis, the psychopomp who led Ani to this judgment, checking the plumb line to see if it indicates perfect balance (where the difference between the two scales is zero). On top of the scale, there is the baboon of Thoth, recording what Anubis measures. In other depictions, we see Thoth as an ibis taking note of Ani's moral standing in the afterlife. If the scales balance, Ani can proceed to the throne of Osiris and receive, as someone deemed 'justified,' his place in his heaven. If not, the constituents of who he is fall apart and are eaten by a monster. No chance to enter Osiris' heaven, rather, total annihilation (or second death).



The Judgment Scene

In epistemology, the scales are *never* balanced. That's the core operational *essential tension* typical of all conceptual knowledge. The plumb line indicates how far off balance one has moved. It is crucial, in the context of truth, that extremes are avoided, for they incapacitate our ability to understand the conditions that make conceptual knowledge possible. As we saw in Vol. I, both ontological realism and ontological idealism are extremes to avoid. Each tries to surpass the other, and while they should shift smoothly to the other side when one becomes too extreme, they instead settle into an extreme state, throwing the balance off. This pushes either the real or the ideal too far, without restoring the ongoing movement of the balance itself ; no constitution but regulation.

Theoreticians invent new models that satisfy logical and mathematical conditions. These can be elegant but need not involve an explicit reference to a laboratory fact or entail consequences that defy common sense (such as those of string theory). If they stick to their theoretical assumptions and deem this 'pure' scientific activity, they have gone too far. The balance suggests that once theoretical activity begins to dominate, it is necessary to identify testable propositions and proceed to test them, so that specific theoretical pathways can be eliminated when challenged by test results.

Mutatis mutandis, experimenters can become stuck in a cycle of repeating their tests without considering whether the theories they use to do so need revision. As soon as experimental work is overreached, and the scale flips *too far* to the other side, new theoretical work is called for. And this movement is ongoing.

When one extreme dominates—either too much theory or too many experiments—the other side needs attention (theoretical concerns are balanced by experimentation, or experiments are revisited with new theoretical insights). This reflects the nature of science, which constantly balances both aspects without ever finding a definitive proposition that holds forever and everywhere. Instead, the process of moving back and forth is endless, with the horizon of definitive truth always just out of reach for science. If science were able to articulate propositions that are definitive and indubitable, the plumb line would read ‘zero,’ but this is *never observed in practice*. Instead, due to the essential tension, there is a *continuous fluctuation* between theory and testing. Criticism calls for knowing when too much weight has been placed on one of the scales, so that it can be rebalanced in time (for extremes tend to be ‘stuck’). This inherent dynamism in scientific practice, which moves from theory to the laboratory and back, contrasts with the attempts at excellence and harmony seen in aesthetics. Both seek to strike and maintain a balance, allowing the feeling of beauty to be sustained over time.

The *fact of feeling*, which makes an observed object seem beautiful by exhibiting excellence and harmony, does not depend on the movement of the scales or whether the plumb line indicates a shift to an extreme. Instead, it focuses solely on balancing the observed object (here: the ‘*ib*’ or ‘heart,’ representing intentionality) against a *perfect model of harmony* (here: the ‘feather of Ma’at). Where truth is the result of an *ongoing process of balancing* that *never* reaches perfection, *never* touches the horizon, but merely *endlessly moves toward it* and always in vain tries to become similar to it (verisimilitude), beauty is the outcome of excellence and harmonization, i.e., the intent to meet, due to the aesthetic attitude, beauty when observing aesthetic properties. Focus lies not on the scales but on the plumb line. No essential tension here, merely an essential relaxation.

The *fact of feeling*, manifesting in aesthetics as an aesthetic attitude observing aesthetic properties, will be further elaborated under the headings of pleasantness, satisfaction, taste, excellence, exemplarity, and sublimity. The judgment of taste concerns only excellence and exemplarity, whereas sublimity moves beyond the conceptual, entering the nondual. In a critical aesthetics, one differentiates between these and avoids both aesthetic objectivism and aesthetic subjectivism. Likewise, both strict emotivism and formalism are combined without exclusivity.

Observation

The observational nature of aesthetics should not come as a surprise. ‘Aesthetics’ is derived from the Greek word ‘*αἰσθησιζικός*’ (*aisthētikos*), or sensate observation. ‘*Aisthēsis*,’ or ‘sensation, feeling, or taste,’ also has a verbal form, namely ‘*αἰσθάνομαι*’ (*aisthanomei*), meaning ‘to observe, to feel, to have a taste

for.’ Indeed, the *experience of beauty* is intimately linked to the *act of observation*. Firstly, because it depends on being seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and felt—*outer* observations. Each of the five senses, so we must think, receives input from the extra-mental world thanks to its sensitive surface, which can be stimulated by various electromagnetic and chemical means. Secondly, because beauty can also be felt by *inner* observations of particular mental objects (like theories, abstract thoughts, or other intellectually pleasing ideas, notions, etc.).

In the case of sensate objects, the distinction between perception and sensation again comes to the forefront, and with it the distinction between mere stimulation of the sensory apparatus and what appears as sensate objects in the field of consciousness of a given subject of experience. What stimulates the sensitive surfaces of our five senses, thereby licensing the posit of perception in the normative sense, and what is identified by the subject as a sensate object (of sight, audition, taste, smell, and touch) are two distinct phenomena.

As explained in Vol. I, sensation (S) equals perception (P) times irreducible interpretation (I), or $S = P \times I$.

This can be complemented by the lesser-known ‘observer effect’ found in quantum mechanics, where the fact known as the ‘theory-ladenness of observation’ is given a broader field of operation, for how we observe some quantum systems directly conditions how they manifest (as a wave or a particle, with or without interference patterns – cf. *infra*). Or, in Popper’s propensity interpretation of Schrödinger’s equation, the observer is an *integral part of the experimental setup* and should not be understood as an ‘outside’ watcher. This underlines the fact that one cannot know anything without an already existing, active cognitive framework. Naive realism and all co-relative ‘explanations’ of how knowledge is acquired (like Greek semantic aduality, the Medieval *reales*, or Wittgenstein’s picture theory of language) are dismissed as contradictory.

Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity

Epistemology aims to identify the conditions that allow us to affirm that an empirico-formal proposition or a set of them is valid *pro tem*. The difference between valid and invalid statements is crucial, as is the dividing line between scientific statements that should be considered and those that should not. Science—whose statements are validated through arguments and tests—and (immanent) metaphysics, which deals with *untestable* sentences that serve as *heuristic background information* for science, are also to be distinguished. Metaphysics can only be supported by logic and argument, and must stay within the limitations set by our conceptual understanding of the world. Consequently, such *immanent* metaphysics focuses on the *totality* of existence. Suppose it surpasses these limitations and seems to reach infinity. In that case, *transcendent* metaphysics is called upon to add an ‘asterisk’ to its ‘transcendent signifiers’ (Derrida) to prevent confusion about statements regarding the transcendent, emphasizing where they are flawed. This is because here, the transcendent is taken

to be non-conceptual, so that any discourse about it can only be indirect and asymptotic, whereas science and immanent metaphysics remain conceptual and therefore bound by the constraints of dualistic formal and critical thought. Epistemology, science, and immanent metaphysics are basically *objective* in their stance. The impact of the subject of experience is kept to a minimum, especially in the laboratory. But we know it cannot be wholly reduced or eliminated. The active, constructive role of the subject of knowledge is *irreversible*. This makes the divide between what appears—the phenomena—and the things in themselves—the *noumena*.

Likewise, ethics involves *judging the moral value of actions*, calling them good, just, fair, or loving. Here, an *objective goal* is always present because one acts motivated to *achieve something specific*, and no action, aside perhaps from what some mystical traditions describe as egoless or selfless activity, is done without intending a particular outcome.

This focus on the object, whether through valid empirico-formal statements or through the goal of action, is absent in aesthetics. Here, the *observer* is central, and the claim made by aesthetics is not coercive or necessary, but merely an *invitation* or *expectation* to acquiesce with the statement that some object is beautiful. Subjectivity (the observer) and intersubjectivity (the context of the latter and the aim of inviting observation of the beauty claimed) are central to the core issue of aesthetics: *What may I expect?* Or, in other words, can ‘my’ aesthetic judgment elicit agreement from ‘others’ observing the same object? Exploring subjectivity allows for a more nuanced analysis of the transcendental ego. This includes examining its role in the works of Kant and Husserl, as well as concepts such as consciousness, intentionality, reflection, reflexive non-intentionality, observation, and psychic mechanisms (Breton). While the transcendental ego’s role in critical epistemology was limited to a relevant community of sign interpreters using signals, icons, and symbols, critical aesthetics’ (inter)subjective stance requires a deeper engagement with subjectivity as well as its embodiment. In epistemology, this was kept at bay, as its required objective stance called for minimizing subjectivity without eliminating it.

Critical Aesthetics

The *harmony* associated with *beauty*, the object of aesthetics, is observed and felt only by a subject intending and able to adopt an *aesthetic attitude* and thus *observe* possible *aesthetic properties* in appearing objects (be they sensate or mental). This is the core tenet of the present aesthetics.

The observation-based approach does not confine itself exclusively to the subjective realm. Beauty is not solely in the eye of the beholder; it is a *relational concept* that transcends mere objectivism and subjectivism. It is rooted not only in objective aesthetic properties but also in a subjective aesthetic attitude. Beauty is always a harmony that is momentarily shown, exhibited, and so perceived. This happens only under the appropriate subjective and objective conditions, at the

crossroads of subjective openness to beauty due to ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ observation, and the objective presence of harmony (as excellence and exemplarity). And this is the core of *critical aesthetics*. Both objectivism and subjectivism can (again) move to extremes, and they should not. They define an antinomy that proves our conceptual thinking about beauty has *transgressed* the necessary boundaries. Critical aesthetics advocates for the ‘middle’ ground. Beauty is neither solely subjective nor objective, but acts as a *bridge* connecting the two, inviting us to *share* the feeling of beauty experienced through an aesthetic attitude that opens the observation of aesthetic properties.

Realist aesthetics brackets the *beholder* of beauty and expands the societal contexts (general, medial, and immediate) involved in appreciating beautiful objects (works of art). In this objectivism, the ontologization of the object — specifically its public aesthetic properties — obscures the fact that subjective observation shapes this enjoyment. Conversely, idealist aesthetics posits that beauty is solely the result of how the subject perceives the world. The latter is seen as depending exclusively on the aesthetic attitude. This view also transgresses. Its ontologization of the subject demands the *constitution* of beauty through the aesthetic attitude. Both objectivism and subjectivism are rejected on critical grounds. From a critical perspective, beauty as a *relational phenomenon* arises when an aesthetic attitude and aesthetic properties come together. It does not exist ‘in’ the subject of aesthetics nor ‘outside’ it, but only *in the togetherness*.

In aesthetic objectivism, beauty is believed to be anchored in aesthetic properties that are regarded as existing in the same way as other object properties. These theories only consider facticity, and aesthetics is thus wholly dependent on historical contexts (immediate, medial, and general) and their economic, social, political, and cultural determinants. Then, aesthetics is nothing more than a counterpoint to sociological thinking. In aesthetic subjectivism, the other extreme, an aesthetic attitude is invoked to explain the presence of beauty, deemed independent of all utilitarian functions, whether didactic, moral, or political. Beauty is the sole outcome of ‘inner-direction.’

Three fundamental concepts related to beauty are : the *fact of feeling*, soft observation, excellence, and harmony. Critical aesthetics investigates these under the headings of transcendental logic, theoretical aesthetics, and applied aesthetics.

- Transcendental aesthetics defines the postulates derived from the *fact of feeling*. As in epistemology and ethics, two sides are identified : an object, understood as a series of aesthetic properties, and a subject cultivating an aesthetic attitude.
- Theoretical aesthetics will further analyze the ‘fact of feeling’ and distinguish between excellence, exemplarity, and sublimity. The latter can only be given body if the harmonizations giving rise to exemplarity integrate disharmonization.
- In applied aesthetics, the harmonizations identified by theoretical aesthetics give rise to various types of artworks. In each case, a tension exists that points away from the harmonization at hand, leading to an overall integration of harmony and disharmony within the context of sublime beauty.

Action

The third domain of normative philosophy focuses on *action*, which is the driving force of ethics. Instead of the image of two scales balancing (continuously tipping to one side and then the other in epistemology, and seeking an excellent, harmonious balance in aesthetics), ethics is no longer about *pairing* but is defined by two factors : *direction* and its *intensity*. Therefore, the image here is that of a *vector*, understood by its *starting point*, *direction*, and the *strength* of its momentum. And the starting point is, of course, the actor's intention, anticipating accomplishing something, to act toward an aim. This action, then, has *direction*—a swing toward the target—and this end can only be achieved with the proper energy or *intensity* of the act itself. If the direction is wrong, the act's ambition is thwarted. If the intensity is too shallow, no aim will be met. If it is too strong, one will shoot over or to the side of the goal. The image shows an archer. She must first decide what her goal is, then pick up the bow, nock the arrow, and draw the string. When the arrow leaves the bow, the archer, the arrow in flight, and the target form a single vectorial whole : \vec{a} , the action vector. Before it left, only intent was present, and if the archer does not aim but puts the bow down, no action (except the preparatory ones) can be pinpointed. Three domains are identified : transcendental ethics articulating the principles, theoretical ethics defining the norms, and applied ethics (morality) identifying contextual maxims of action.

- Ethics' transcendental logic reflexively unfolds the *fact of action* (*factum actionis*) into the actor, the action, and the action-result.
- Theoretical ethics draws the line between ethics understood as a science or as a normative discipline (such as epistemology and aesthetics). This division identifies the proper domain of ethics as *normative* rather than descriptive or scientific. It is an 'ought' rooted in the necessary conditions of action itself.

The *fact of action* unfolds in this context as a series of complementary norms forming a quaternio : *intent* versus *duty*, and *conscience* versus *vocation*. This fourfold organizes our actions at four possible levels of increasing participation complexity : goodness, justice, fairness, and love. Each moment of participation shapes problems that can only be resolved at a higher level. Eventually, in love, these tensions vanish in the perspective of planetary participationism, a system of ethics that leads to a global political system and a participatory economy beyond troubled neoliberalism and the shortcomings of fanatical communism. Critical ethics is a normative, global, participatory system of growing involvement in the process-based, dependent origination that constitutes the world.

- Applied ethics identifies universal *action domains*, i.e., typical networks of action vectors describing the dynamical stages of the constitution of the human life world. In each domain, a tension remains that can only be resolved at a higher, more complex level of action, love being the most complicated action of all.

BEAUTY