

# EROTICS OR HERMENEUTICS?

## NEHAMAS AND GADAMER ON BEAUTY AND ART

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**ABSTRACT** Although grounded in different philosophical traditions, Alexander Nehamas and Hans-Georg Gadamer each return to Plato's idea of the beautiful, to *kalon*, in order to reclaim the relevance of beauty for our understanding of art today. Their appeal to Plato challenges the reign of aesthetics that both see inaugurated by Kant's aesthetic theory. Nehamas criticizes the Kantian notion of "disinterest" as a "pleasure bereft of desire" in order to reassert the passionate longing that draws us toward art. Gadamer criticizes Kant's analysis for the way it divides the aesthetic from the cognitive, thereby alienating art and beauty from any claim to knowledge or truth. So Nehamas emphasizes the import of Platonic *erōs* to a phenomenological account of our experience of beauty. Love, so understood, elides any easy distinction between the sensual and spiritual, between the desire to possess and the passion to know—just as beauty cannot be captured in distinctions between what is and what appears. Gadamer draws out precisely the ontological dimension of the beautiful as self-presentation. In so doing he revives the intimacy of beauty and truth, *alētheia*, as the movement into unconcealment by which something comes forth into its presence. In the end, I suggest appropriating Nehamas's phenomenological analysis of the erotic to Gadamer's ontological understanding of the alethic in order to renew the relation of *erōs* and *kalon* into an account that recalls this Platonic legacy for a contemporary hermeneutics of art.

**Keywords:** art, beauty, hermeneutics, Nehamas, Gadamer, Plato

### INTRODUCTION

This article considers two contemporary contributions to the philosophy of art that return to Plato's interpretation *erōs* and *kalon* in order to appropriate them for an account of the experience of art that circumvents the limitations of the modern concept of the aesthetic. Alexander Nehamas revives the Platonic view of love as the "passionate longing" for the beautiful that, he claims, better characterizes our engagement with art than the idea of "disinterested pleasure."<sup>1</sup>

Hans-Georg Gadamer appeals to the Platonic notion of beauty to mark the “mysterious presence” that he believes we encounter in the work of art that allows us to reaffirm the truth claim of art.<sup>2</sup> I argue that while each appropriation emphasizes an essential aspect of Plato’s account of love and beauty, the two should be seen as complementary approaches that, taken together, provide a more comprehensive retrieval of Plato’s thought for a hermeneutic understanding of art.

In *Only the Promise of Happiness* Alexander Nehamas articulates a plea to reconsider “The Place of Beauty in the World of Art.” The book opens with a reflection on beauty that deliberately returns to Plato’s discussion of *to kalon*, emphasizing the import of *erōs*. Referring to the *Symposium* he remarks on the celebration of desire in the ascent to the beautiful laid out in Socrates famous speech recounting Diotima’s way of love. “For Plato, the only reaction appropriate to beauty is *erōs*—love, the desire to possess it.”<sup>3</sup> Although the first steps on this ascent are firmly rooted in the world of the senses—that is, in sexual desire—it culminates in the knowledge and love of the beautiful itself that is manifest in every beautiful thing. Here he affirms Plato’s conviction that the revival of beauty leads through love as the genuine mode of engagement with art. But here love shows itself to bridge any divide between the sensual and the spiritual, between desire to engage and the passion to know. A scholar of Plato, Nehamas assigns himself the task of defending this insight into the essential relation of love and beauty, and to explore its import for understanding art. He therefore draws on Plato to elaborate an “erotics” of beauty that illumines our interpretive interaction with art.

Almost half a century earlier Hans-Georg Gadamer concludes *Truth and Method*, his magnum opus on philosophical hermeneutics, with a reflection on the Platonic idea of the beautiful.<sup>4</sup> Referring to the *Phaedrus* where the beautiful is proclaimed to be *to ekphanestaton*, the most radiant of all (the ideas), he seizes on the scintillating quality of its appearing (*Erscheinen*) as a shining (*Scheinen*). In Gadamer’s estimation, such radiant appearance defines the beautiful; it belongs to the being of the beautiful to appear. Here he sees a way to renew Plato’s insight into the essential relation of *to kalon* and *alētheia*, especially where the latter, truth, is thought as unconcealment. His aim is to retrieve the unity of beauty, truth, and being to which the Platonic dialogues attest but without assuming the metaphysical baggage of “Platonism.” According to Gadamer, a Plato scholar in his own right, it is in the experience of beauty that the supposed *chorismos* separating idea and appearance is overcome. For the idea of the beautiful is present, whole and undivided, in each of its appearances. In such presence, exemplified by the beautiful, we encounter the original meaning of *methexis* as the mutual participation in which idea and appearance exhibit a “genuine being-together.”<sup>5</sup> From this standpoint he seeks to recognize the relevance of beauty for the truth-claim of art. Gadamer thus draws on

Plato to articulate an ontological conception of the beautiful for a hermeneutic understanding of art.

Hence the title: “Erotics or Hermeneutics?” This opposition is adapted from Susan Sontag’s polemic *Against Interpretation* where she concludes: “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”<sup>6</sup> But even Nehamas maintains that this is a false opposition: “hermeneutics and erotics, as Plato knew, do not exclude one another [...]. What something *is* is not nearly as independent of what it *means* as it may seem to be—no more, in fact, than what *seems to be* is independent of what *is*.”<sup>7</sup> This passage, linking meaning, being, and appearance, harbors deep hermeneutic commitments that this article intends to elicit and elaborate in order to open up a philosophical context within which any presumed opposition of erotics and hermeneutics may be overcome and a meeting between Nehamas and Gadamer staged. The possibility of such a meeting is initially based on the fact that both share a common goal—to renew the relevance of beauty for the understanding of art—and a common inspiration—Plato’s concept of the beautiful. My aim is to show how the contribution of each serves to enact a retrieval of Plato that enables an account of art as a hermeneutical phenomenon; while Nehamas offers a phenomenology of love that reconceives our experience of art, Gadamer provides an ontology of the beautiful that accounts for art’s unique presence.

## BEYOND THE AESTHETIC

Nehamas and Gadamer are each concerned about the impoverishment suffered by beauty due to the aesthetic turn in modern thought; in fact, both coordinate the decline of the beautiful with the ascendancy of the aesthetic. Further, they regard Kant’s aesthetic theory as pivotal to this turn toward the aesthetic. For Nehamas, the issue centers on Kant’s provision that aesthetic judgment is determined by a disinterested pleasure.<sup>8</sup> In Kant’s estimation, he notes, “[b]eauty is manifested only through a contemplation of nature or art that produces ‘a satisfaction without any interest.’”<sup>9</sup> Kant’s explicit intention here is to distinguish the pleasure that pertains to aesthetic judgment from either the “agreeable” (sensuous enjoyment) or the “good,” both of which we desire to possess. In these cases, Kant argues, desire exhibits an interest in the existence of their respective objects.<sup>10</sup> In the aesthetic judgment, however, no such interest characterizes our desire for the things we regard as beautiful. With this “enigmatic formulation” asserting pleasure without interest, Nehamas holds that “Kant disavowed the ancients”—and that means, above all, Plato, for whom the sole comportment appropriate to the beautiful is erotic. According to Kant’s formulation, beauty is no longer properly apprehended in a passionate longing for the beautiful thing. Instead he maintains that the appropriate response to the things we judge to be beautiful is one which exhibits no interest either in their possession or in their consequences. In Nehamas’s curt assessment, “It is a pleasure bereft of desire.”<sup>11</sup>

Gadamer likewise finds in Kant a decisive moment in the advent of the aesthetic. In his account, however, it is less the divorce of beauty from desire that is crucial than the separation of beauty from truth which the Kantian critique installs. According to Gadamer, “[t]he grounding of aesthetics went hand in hand with its delimitation from concepts and conceptual knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> In this statement he identifies the inaugural gesture of aesthetic theory that, in his view, both opens up the domain of the aesthetic and yet closes off the experience of art and the beautiful. This delimitation is worked out in the *Critique of Judgment* where Kant argues that aesthetic judgment does not rest on a *concept* of beauty. Since judgments of beauty cannot invoke universal criteria, they are not objectively grounded on any properties of the object that could be specified in a determinate concept. Instead Kant maintains that aesthetic judgments are subjectively grounded on the feeling of disinterested pleasure in the judging subject. As Kant says, the beautiful pleases without a concept that would determine its purpose.<sup>13</sup> But without deploying a determinate concept such judgments can supply no knowledge of their objects. Because nothing is known of the object judged as beautiful, Kant denies to aesthetic judgment any cognitive significance. The justification for aesthetic judgment now lies not in the conceptual grasp of an objective content, but rather in the representation of the beautiful object that animates the mind by stimulating a “free play” of the cognitive faculties (of imagination and understanding). With one hand Kant thus grants a significant role to such judgments while, with the other, denies them any legitimate claim to knowledge. By delimiting the aesthetic from concepts, Kant also severs beauty from truth and art from knowledge.<sup>14</sup> In so doing Kant’s aesthetics strips art of its hermeneutical significance as an experience of truth.

Despite this divergence in the focus of their critical attention toward Kant, there is a deeper accord in their respective evaluations of the aesthetic. For both Nehamas and Gadamer the aesthetic conception enervates the beautiful, ultimately depriving it of the breadth and depth of meaning it had for the ancients. Framed by its confinement within the “aesthetic dimension” (Gadamer), beauty is segregated from any relation to the world which, until this aesthetic turn, had been integral to it. Gadamer claims that the aesthetic becomes an autonomous domain which defines itself over and against reality as an ideal realm.<sup>15</sup> Nehamas points out that, although the word continued to be used in critical and philosophical discourse, “beauty” came to be replaced by “the aesthetic” which is completely isolated from all relationships with the rest of the world.<sup>16</sup> He argues that today philosophy has “preserved the beauty of art [...] but] only by means of thinking them as ‘aesthetic,’ a category that obliterated the vision that had once stimulated Plato’s imagination.”<sup>17</sup> Gadamer would surely concur. In his view, Plato’s vision is subverted by the prevailing predicament in which beauty is alienated from truth by the dominance of the aesthetic, a condition which Jay Bernstein even calls “aesthetic alienation.”<sup>18</sup> Nehamas might also find this phrase

suggestive of the situation in which art and beauty are divorced from desire. In any case, after Kant, beauty could only be preserved within the category of the aesthetic where—confined (within the aesthetic), isolated (from the world), divorced (from sensuous desire), and alienated (from the true)—the original force of the phenomenon withered and the older significance of the concept waned. In face of this fate, Nehamas and Gadamer work toward reviving the contemporary fortune of beauty by renewing the ancient concept of *kalon* and reasserting its continued relevance for art.

Nehamas's argues that the diminished status of beauty largely depends on its alignment with the surface appearance of things. His diagnosis of the current situation stresses two conditions. First, he sees a profound complicity between the deflation of beauty and the discipline of criticism. "The position of judgment in criticism is in real conflict with the place of beauty in art."<sup>19</sup> Insofar as it is taken for granted that the point of our interaction with art is to render a judgment that determines its aesthetic value, the predominance of judgment in criticism places it at odds with the preeminence of appearance in beauty. Beauty is said to affect us at first glance and is therefore thought to reside in its immediate appearance to the senses. However, since criticism requires not only time for examination and evaluation but also demands the application of critical intelligence, it is a highly mediated enterprise. Hence the value determined by criticism does not seem to be the same as the value offered by beauty. As a result, where criticism provides the model for our interaction with art, it tends to expel beauty from the experience and discourse of art. Second, Nehamas carries his account of the devaluation of beauty into the heart of artistic modernism. "One of the central characteristics of Modernism," he asserts, "was an effort—largely successful—to detach the value of art from appearance." Citing abstract painters like Malevich and Kandinsky, he claims that artistic modernism cultivates "a sense that neither the appearance of the world nor the surface of the painting is where its value lies."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, modern art no longer seeks to be either attractive or pleasing. Indeed, its refusal of ready access has become a hallmark of the often deliberately difficult works of modern artists. At the zenith of modernism's dominance Barnett Newman could famously announce, "The impulse of modern art was to destroy beauty."<sup>21</sup> As long as beauty is associated with surface appearance and sensuous pleasure it seems impossible to regard modernist works of art as beautiful. By treating it as the frivolous counterpart of genuine art (Clement Greenberg) or its dangerous enemy (T.S. Eliot) modernist criticism reinforced the devaluation of beauty. While modernism held sway, Nehamas concludes, "the dependence of art on beauty, with its connections to the rest of the world, kept diminishing, [and] the rule of the aesthetic kept expanding."<sup>22</sup> To rehabilitate the place of beauty in art it is necessary to reassert an older, richer notion of the beautiful against its current contraction.

In this respect, Nehamas would no doubt join Gadamer's call to transcend the aesthetic in order to recall the original meaning of the beautiful preserved in Plato's thought. Gadamer turns his critical attention to marking the limits of the aesthetic and the concept of art that it legitimizes. Concomitant with the rise of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, he argues that "[a]rt becomes a standpoint of its own and establishes its own autonomous claim to supremacy."<sup>23</sup> Further, this standpoint sets art apart as the realm of non-purposive creation and disinterested pleasure over and against the life of society governed by means–end relationships. "For now art, as the art of beautiful appearance, was contrasted with practical reality and understood in terms of this contrast."<sup>24</sup> Only from this standpoint does the concept of the aesthetic as an autonomous realm become credible. As a result, art and beauty must reconstitute themselves within the "aesthetic dimension." This forms the basis of Gadamer's critique which argues that art and beauty are essentially distorted by the abstraction they suffer under the purview of aesthetics. "As soon as the concept of art took on those features to which we have become accustomed and the work of art began to stand on its own divorced from its original context of life, only then did art become simply 'art' in the 'museum without walls' of Malraux."<sup>25</sup> Art becomes simply "art" when it is conceived exclusively as an aesthetic phenomenon. This is achieved by removing everything extrinsic to the work of art and focusing solely upon its "aesthetic quality." "By disregarding everything in which the work of art is rooted (its original context of life, and the secular or religious function that gave it significance), it becomes visible as the 'pure work of art.'"<sup>26</sup> The artwork is effectively purified through a process of abstraction that Gadamer attributes to the "aesthetic consciousness." By abstracting any "extra-aesthetic elements" aesthetic consciousness differentiates the "pure" work of art from its purpose, function, and even its significant content thereby distinguishing the aesthetic quality of the work. Similarly, the original ontological significance of the beautiful is diminished when limited to the aesthetic in this narrower sense.<sup>27</sup> For Gadamer, to do justice to both art and beauty it is therefore necessary to transcend the purity of the aesthetic.

## THE PROMISE OF BEAUTY

Despite its expulsion from philosophical and critical discourse about the arts, Nehamas seeks to redeem the relevance of beauty. Drawing upon his long engagement with Plato, Nehamas insists on the essential relation of *erōs* and *kalon*. "It was one of Plato's most startling and original insights to see that love impels forward while beauty beckons."<sup>28</sup> At the heart of this insight lies the Platonic conviction that beautiful things produce a passionate longing that is incompatible with disinterested pleasure. Critical of the modern mistrust of passion, Nehamas underscores the fiery reaction to beauty that he finds characteristic of

the ancient Greeks. In order to embrace this erotic response he is prepared to acknowledge that the meaning of love for Plato involves the desire to possess what is beautiful. Nehamas realizes that talk of “possession” may sound like a desire to dominate the other, but this is neither his view nor, for that matter, Plato’s. As Socrates explicitly says of the good (in response to Diotima), it seems that the lover of beauty too wants to make the beautiful their own (*Symposium* 204e–205a).<sup>29</sup> However, as an authentic expression of love, this desire is not simply selfish; it exhibits a real concern and care for the beloved as well. While undoubtedly self-related, our desire for the beautiful object is genuinely other-focused. As Nehamas says, the passionate longing incited in the lover by the beautiful is a desire to make the beloved part of the lover’s life.

Indeed, the ascent toward the beautiful described by Socrates in the *Symposium* shows that “all beautiful things draw us beyond themselves, leading us to recognize and love other, more precious beauties.”<sup>30</sup> But it is important for Nehamas that this ascent begins with a man falling in love with a beautiful boy—that is, it begins with the sexual desire for the beloved.<sup>31</sup> More important, however, is that while this desire expands beyond the body to the soul and even beyond the individual to the beauty of laws, institutions, and knowledge before culminating in the “form” of the beautiful itself, this desire remains a desire to possess its object.<sup>32</sup> “Even the last stage [of this ascent],” Nehamas writes, “is not a moment of pure contemplation that is his desire has not been sublimated into a higher disembodied phenomenon. Tellingly, the philosopher wants from the Form just what ordinary men who know no better want of beautiful boys: intercourse (*sunousia*).”<sup>33</sup> Here Nehamas adamantly opposes any “purifying” of desire that would remove its sensuous aspect in favor of its spiritual element. But he wants to question the separation of desire from knowledge as well. For the desire to make the beautiful part of one’s life cannot be distinguished from the desire to better understand the beloved which, further, cannot finally be distinguished from the desire to know ourselves. Hence the love of the beautiful is simultaneously the longing to possess and the passion to know the beloved such that beauty can be sundered neither from understanding nor desire. In Nehamas’s view, Plato helps us to see that any satisfactory account of beauty must acknowledge that even “the most abstract and intellectual beauty provokes the urge to possess it no less than the most sensual [beauty] inspires the passion to come to know it better.” Moreover, recognition of this fact about love triggers a corresponding realization about beauty: “No easy distinction between body and spirit, inner and outer, superficial and deep can accommodate its complexity.”<sup>34</sup> Thus it is the essential relation of *erōs* and *kalon* in Plato’s thought that provides the inspiration and the measure for Nehamas’s discussion.

The main line of Nehamas’s argument unfolds from this return to Plato into a hermeneutical treatment of the relation between love, beauty, appearance, and interpretation. His account of the relation between love and beauty begins with

a description of being attracted to someone when “all of a sudden, everything becomes background—everything but a pair of eyes, a face, a body, pushing the rest out of your field of vision and giving you a moment of awe and a shock of delight, perhaps even a passionate longing.” In that moment, at least, “you are looking at beauty.”<sup>35</sup> The all but irresistible urge to keep looking is quickly followed by the desire to draw near because you sense it would be good to come close to them. Nehamas insists that, however sexual the attraction, this desire is never a “merely” physical phenomenon; “just as the desire and kind of one’s sexuality reaches up to the pinnacles of one’s spirit, so spirit reaches down into the deepest recesses of sex.”<sup>36</sup> What sparks one’s desire to come close is nothing but beauty itself—not just an “inner” or “spiritual” beauty of the soul that could (somehow) be separated from the “outer” or “physical” beauty of the body. Such desire must be viewed more holistically as “the expression of one’s need to become actively engaged—sexually, psychologically, ethically—with another person.”<sup>37</sup> We respond to the beautiful by trying to make it our own. For Nehamas, this requires a fundamental openness and vulnerability to the beautiful beloved which takes possession of us as much as we may seek to possess it. But at this juncture the language of possession seems prejudicial to his real point. For especially where such desire is mutual each seeks to make the other a part of their lives, thereby exposing themselves to the other’s influence, even in unexpected ways. In fact, one does not know exactly what one wants from the desired relationship. This requires an element of trust that may be betrayed wherein lies the inherent “danger of beauty.”<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, Nehamas maintains it is impossible to love someone (or something) we find ugly. “The question is not whether I can love someone who is *in fact* ugly [...] but whether I can love someone I *find* ugly, and I believe that’s impossible.”<sup>39</sup> Just as Plato maintains that *kalon* is the proper object of *erōs*, Nehamas holds that only beauty inspires love—with the proviso that beauty is an appearance that only lasts while love endures.<sup>40</sup>

This last point refers us to the relation between beauty and appearance which Nehamas neatly sums up: “beauty is always revealed in appearance but never completely.”<sup>41</sup> Much of the complexity that surrounds the beautiful has to do with its relation to appearance. Nehamas concedes that beauty belongs to the appearance of things. This is evident in the fact that the beauty of something often strikes us quite suddenly such that the very immediacy of our experience would seem to align beauty with appearance. Although Nehamas by no means rejects the notion that beauty is a feature of appearance, he does contest the view that the appearance of beauty is exclusively confined to the visible surface of things. So he insists that while “[b]eauty is not identical with an attractive appearance,” it is also “not nearly as independent of it as our easy dichotomies between ‘inner’ and ‘outer,’ ‘sensuous’ and ‘moral,’ ‘physical’ and ‘spiritual,’” would suggest. “This relationship is much more vexed and complex: beauty is always manifested in appearance without ever being limited to it.”<sup>42</sup> For Nehamas,



this requires that we conceive appearance more generously so that it includes not just the purely visual aspects of something, but all of those features which we are made aware of by looking at it.<sup>43</sup> The beautiful becomes manifest in all of its appearances—visual, psychological, and ethical. But why then does he maintain that it is not limited to appearance? Because Nehamas holds that whatever we find beautiful always intimates other aspects of itself that it has not yet disclosed to us, other features than those which have already appeared. The beautiful transcends its appearances not by directing us beyond the realm of appearances altogether, but rather by directing us toward new appearances. Hence, for Nehamas, the beautiful is a phenomenon of excess, of inexhaustible appearance. As long as it is beautiful the object has more to reveal. Here he verges on the recognition of the self-disclosure of beauty which, as we will see, Gadamer holds to be distinctive of the being of the beautiful.

The third relation, between appearance and interpretation, brings us more explicitly into the domain of art. Our passion to engage the beautiful is continuous with our longing to understand the beauty of someone (or something) that captivates us in order “to make it part of our life.” We therefore find ourselves compelled to understand what we find beautiful, to interpret what we love.<sup>44</sup> Understanding, for example, a beautiful work of art, requires an interpretive engagement with it. Moreover, interpretation cannot be sharply distinguished from either description or evaluation. Regarding the former, Nehamas writes: “The distinction between merely describing what a work of art is and interpreting what it means [...] can’t be systematically maintained.”<sup>45</sup> Concerning the latter, he says: “The moment interpretation begins and gives the first hint that different elements may be parts of a whole, an evaluation has already been made.”<sup>46</sup> To interpret a work is to understand the attraction—i.e. the attractive appearance(s)—that its beauty holds for us. Interpretation, then, is the meaningful articulation of the manifold appearances of the beautiful, especially in works of art. Viewed in this way, the concept of interpretation does not hang on a distinction between surface and depth, just as the concept of beauty does not depend on a distinction between appearance and reality. Rather “depth” is a metaphor for what lies “beyond” those appearances already disclosed which now come to the fore and need further interpretation. Interpreting something is a matter of unfolding the various appearances thereby “establishing a web of connections between the elements of one thing and between one thing and another.”<sup>47</sup> In each appearance the artwork discloses something (of itself) while referring to further features that we desire to understand. Since each thing resembles and differs from others in innumerable ways, there is no inherent limit to the interpretive process. “Interpretation itself is interminable.”<sup>48</sup> Of course, this process does conclude; interpretation is terminated. But ultimately this happens only when our interest wanes. “Always incomplete in itself, interpretation continues as long as love and beauty [...] persist.”<sup>49</sup>

When it comes to beauty we have no choice but to desire to engage with it; likewise, we are also compelled to interpret its appearance(s). There is then a sense in which, captivated by the beautiful, we are “called” to understand it. “Beauty always remains a bit of a mystery, forever a step beyond anything I can ever say about it, more like something calling me without showing me exactly what it is calling me to do.”<sup>50</sup> What accounts for the mystery of beauty is the manner in which it always exceeds its current manifestation(s). This is the “more” that the beautiful seems to hold in reserve, so to speak, for the lover who heeds its call. Indeed, “when you have found everything a beautiful thing has to give you will have lost what made it beautiful, the promise of more, and with it the love that desired what was promised.”<sup>51</sup> This herald of “more” is what Nehamas dubs “the promise of beauty.”<sup>52</sup> In this promise lies the mystery of beauty which does not point us toward some ideal realm behind or beyond appearances as such, but rather points us beyond those appearances that have already been disclosed toward those which have yet to appear. Both the incompleteness of love (which Socrates characterizes as a “lack” in the *Symposium*) and the interminability of interpretation are therefore rooted in the as yet undisclosed appearances that the beautiful has to offer—that is, in the “more” that beauty promises.

## THE ACTUALITY OF BEAUTY

Noting the ancient Greek contrast of the beautiful and the useful (*chreisimon*), Gadamer observes that artworks are neither directed toward nor determined by a specific use. Although they are certainly products that require the relevant art or skill (*techné*), they are not produced merely to serve some useful purpose; they are also there to be contemplated. Gadamer also observes the significance of the Greek word *theoria* which means “being purely present to what is truly real.”<sup>53</sup> As a mode of contemplation, *theoria* indicates a “true participation” in the sense of “being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees.”<sup>54</sup> Here, he believes, we see the close connection between the “aesthetical” and “theoretical” in Greek thought. In this respect, Gadamer holds that the arts exhibit the close proximity between “the experience of contemplating the beautiful and knowing the true” expressed in ancient Greek thought.<sup>55</sup> In light of this proximity he affirms the essential relation of beauty and truth which he finds expressed, above all, in the Platonic philosophy. To retrieve this essential relation, however, both concepts must be rethought in a “more Greek way” that conceives *to kalon* as shining-forth, i.e. as the radiant appearing of being, and *aletheia* as coming-forth, i.e. as the abrupt emergence into unconcealment. Indeed, Gadamer asserts that “Plato was the first to show that the essential element in the beautiful was *aletheia*.”<sup>56</sup> Beauty and truth here converge with an understanding of being as the movement of self-disclosure. For Gadamer, such self-disclosure is a “doing of the thing itself (*die Sache Selbst*),” that is, the thing discloses itself so that it

comes forth in some essential aspect of its being. On this view, the experience of beauty cannot be reduced to the subjective disposition of the one who experiences it. Instead one is caught up in the experience of beauty such that their very participation enables the self-disclosure of the beautiful thing to occur. When this happens something is known about the being of what is thereby disclosed. Thus truth is primarily a process of being presenting itself and not a matter of the subject's self-determination.<sup>57</sup> Our basic role as spectators is to become engaged in this process so that the self-disclosure occurs, so that truth happens.

So when, in the closing pages of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer invokes the older tradition in Western thought that regards the beautiful as a universal metaphysical concept, he seeks to reassert an ontological understanding of beauty. Although he recognizes that we can no longer endorse the substance metaphysics that anchors this ancient concept, Gadamer nonetheless sees in Plato's account of the beautiful in the *Phaedrus* (250d) as *to ekphanestaton*, as the most radiant, an aspect of the phenomenon that can contribute to the development of a hermeneutic ontology.<sup>58</sup> More specifically, in its very radiance he finds the quality of the beautiful that, even in Plato's estimation, distinguishes it from the other ideas (of justice, moderation, etc.) which lack the luster of the beautiful and that makes the latter alone palpable to our senses.<sup>59</sup> This distinction exhibits something essential about the beautiful—namely, that it belongs to the being of the beautiful to appear.<sup>60</sup> By virtue of its radiant appearance, the beautiful thing presents itself; it shines forth amidst the visible. In this respect, the beautiful is always present, whole and undivided, everywhere it appears.<sup>61</sup> For Gadamer, this means that the beautiful constantly overcomes the separation (*chorismos*) of idea and appearance, the “metaphysical crux” of Platonism, in a more ordinary participation (*methexis*). According to his reading of Plato, participation just means the presence of the idea in each and every one of its appearances.<sup>62</sup> Thus while the beautiful “itself” is a one that must be distinguished from its many appearances, it does not exist separate from them. The beautiful “is” in the various appearances in which we encounter it. The upshot for Gadamer is that the beautiful has its being in its appearing. Moreover, this feature of the beautiful reveals something essential about being as well—namely, that being “is” self-presentation.<sup>63</sup>

This ontological appropriation of the beautiful is what allows Gadamer to realign it with the true. Here again he returns to Plato and the concept of truth as *aletheia*, unconcealment. Confirming Heidegger's insight into the meaning of *aletheia* for early Greek thought, Gadamer nonetheless resists his mentor's interpretation of Plato, according to which Plato conceals the original meaning of *aletheia*. Heidegger holds that this fateful decision—which inaugurates metaphysics as the “forgottenness of being”—is actually twofold: a decision both to stabilize being by conceiving it as *idea*, i.e. as a domain of static ideas, and to conceptualize truth as *homoiosis*, i.e. as the conformity of intellectual vision (to the

idea). According to Heidegger's verdict, by yoking *aletheia* to *idea* Plato conceals truth as unconcealment in favor of truth as correctness.<sup>64</sup> Gadamer, however, maintains that Plato still retains an understanding of *aletheia* as unconcealment, that is, of truth as coming into presence. This view not only refers truth to being rather than knowing, but also refers it to movement rather than stasis.<sup>65</sup> This says that truth is the very movement from concealment into unconcealment, the emergence into presence and not a stable, unchanging presence. It also means that truth is not primarily a matter of knowing where that is conceived as the agreement between the mind (or proposition) and some state of affairs, but is instead a matter of self-disclosure in which something becomes manifest as the being it is. Just as the beautiful strikes immediately, the truth appears suddenly; just as the beautiful presents itself by shining forth in the radiance of its appearance, the true discloses itself by coming forth in the unconcealment of its presence. Where this happens, that is, where being appears, Gadamer speaks of an event or happening of truth (*Wahrheitsgeschehen*).

Yet the appearing of being does not take place apart from the involvement of the one for whom it occurs. In the case of art, the work only comes to presence through the participation of the spectator. The artwork has its being in its appearing and thus depends for its existence on the spectator for and through whom it is fulfilled. For Gadamer, a genuine experience of art is one in which we become absorbed in the work. Thus the spectator is not to be understood as simply standing "outside" the work conceived as something complete in itself apart from the spectator; rather the spectator is also, in a certain sense, "inside" the work. So while the spectator remains at an "absolute distance" from the work (thereby precluding any intervention in it), this is nevertheless an "aesthetic distance" that makes possible "a genuine and comprehensive participation in what is presented before us."<sup>66</sup> This means that the spectator takes part in the self-presentation of the work. Indeed, "the genuine reception and experience of the work can only exist for one who 'plays along,' that is, one performs in an active way himself."<sup>67</sup> According to this hermeneutic view, the spectator is therefore integral to the being of the artwork precisely because the artwork does not appear apart from its performance. Insofar as the artwork consists in its appearing, the work cannot be detached from its performance. "Rather," Gadamer writes, "it is in the performance and only in it [...] that we encounter the work itself."<sup>68</sup> In other words, the work of art only achieves its completion through its performative enactment. This is why, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer takes play to be the mode of being proper to the artwork: just as the game fully exists only when it is played, so too the work of art is truly "there" ("*Da*") only when it is performed. Engaged by the work, the spectator is absorbed in it, moving back and forth between the parts of the work and the whole in which they are related, so that "it" emerges. Hence Gadamer's assertion: "*Alle Kunst ist im Vollzug.*"<sup>69</sup> Art has its being in the performance that constitutes the event of its appearing. By

performing the work, the spectator allows it to come forth so that what is meant becomes present for those who participate.

Where the spectator participates in the work such that “it” comes forth—that is, such that the work appears or presents itself—Gadamer speaks of the “actuality” (“*Aktualität*”) of the work achieved through its performative enactment. It is noteworthy that his lectures on art, translated as *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, bears the German title *Die Aktualität des Schönen*. But this English rendition misses the aspect of event that resonates in the German. For Gadamer, however, this is the key; it is precisely as an event that beauty is relevant to his hermeneutic account of art. Insofar as the work of art comes to presence in the performative enactment, the work has its being in its appearing—that is, in the vital, living event of the beautiful that takes place there. According to Gadamer, “what is essential is that we have to do here with appearing (*Erscheinen*).” Now the radiance of the beautiful is what scintillates and sparkles within appearance joining the *Scheinen* of the beautiful to the *Er-scheinen* of its appearing. Thus it is “the unique shining-forth (*Scheinen*) of the beautiful that is the magic of art [...]”<sup>70</sup> Gadamer thereby connects his hermeneutic appropriation of *kalon* as the shining-forth of the beautiful with *aletheia* as the coming forth of the true. Yet as a movement into unconcealment *aletheia* also implies an aspect of concealment which belongs to the being of that which presents itself. “The self-showing of what is, of that which shows itself as it is, includes—if it is—a holding within and a self-restraint.”<sup>71</sup> This withholding or sheltering is the proper counterpart to revealing or disclosing. This accounts for both the ontological weight of the artwork and for its inexhaustibility. “*Aletheia* does not simply mean unconcealment. Certainly we say that ‘it’ comes forth, but the coming-forth itself has something peculiar about it [—namely,...] that the work of art presents itself in such a way that it both conceals itself and at the same time authenticates itself.”<sup>72</sup> Thus in the shining-forth of the beautiful the work comes forth into the unconcealedness of its appearance wherein the happening of truth in the work simultaneously shelters and conceals itself, preserving new modes of appearing and other possibilities of meaning that only emerge in different ways of encountering it.

## THE EVENT OF BEAUTY

The affinities between Nehamas and Gadamer are numerous and significant. First, both seek to renew the relevance of beauty for our understanding of art. Further, they do so by returning to Plato’s idea of the beautiful in order to recover a richer understanding of beauty retained in the ancient concept of *to kalon*. Second, both attribute the decline of beauty in critical and philosophical discourse about art to the ascendancy of the aesthetic in modernity which they see taking shape as an autonomous domain segregated from life. Moreover, they

each locate the inaugural moment of this ascendance in Kant's aesthetic theory where beauty suffers "aesthetic alienation" due to its dissociation from desire and truth respectively. Third, while each pursues different aspects of this Platonic legacy—Nehamas emphasizing the import of love to beauty and Gadamer focusing on the proximity of beauty to truth—both exhibit a hermeneutic approach to the beautiful in art. This is evident in their shared concern with the integral role of understanding and interpretation in our engagement with art. And, fourth, each offers a positive characterization of appearance in their account of the beautiful in art. Insofar as beauty appears it can never be detached from appearance even though the beauty of an artwork always exceeds any of its particular appearances. In this concluding section, I want to sketch a way of thinking through the hermeneutic approach common to both Nehamas and Gadamer in order to show that their different approaches to art can be conceived as complementary, thereby appropriating an "erotics" of art to a "hermeneutics" of art and that the ontological aspect of the artwork conceived as an event deepens and radicalizes their shared hermeneutical account of art, thereby appropriating Nehamas's approach to Gadamer's.

The principal strength of Nehamas's approach lies in his effort to show that the relation of love and beauty is essential to our engagement with art. Invoking Plato Nehamas seeks to make four points about *erōs*: that love is the passionate longing for its object, the beloved; that the beloved is always experienced as beautiful; that the longing inspired by the beautiful is both physical and spiritual, a desire to engage and to know; that such desire constantly impels us to experience and understand more of the beloved. The beautiful individual (it is always this person or that artwork which one loves) draws us out beyond ourselves in an expansive movement of understanding the beloved and thereby ourselves. The desire to make the beloved part of our life is, at the same time, a desire to understand it. "We have no choice but to interpret the objects of our love; no choice but to try to understand what makes them beautiful, what provokes our love."<sup>73</sup> In the effort to understand the beloved (person, work) one inevitably engages in a process of interpretation that is, in principle, interminable. "The experience of beauty is inseparable from interpretation, and just as beauty always promises more than it has given so far, so interpretation, the effort to understand what it promises, is forever a work in progress."<sup>74</sup> The interpretive effort ceases, if it does, only when beauty has nothing more to offer. But this attraction is not simply a matter of the immediate feeling evoked by a beautiful person or work. "It is [rather] concretely manifested in the rest of life, it is an unfolding, a working out, and a constant revision of the interpretation of the beautiful thing that sends us in directions we would not have taken without it."<sup>75</sup> So when Nehamas says that he finds Manet's *Olympia* beautiful he is not just reporting a feeling he has while looking at it; he is saying that he wants to come to know it better. When a work attracts its viewers it

captivates them and does not let them go. They feel a need to enter into it more deeply, to understand it more fully, and to allow their lives to be enriched by it. Enraptured by the beautiful, we are “called” to understand it and so understand ourselves. The attractive force of beauty inspires a passionate longing that draws us into the work while calling us forth to experience its further features and to disclose its other aspects. In this manner Nehamas appropriates Diotima’s ascent to the beautiful which begins with the love of someone or something that impels us outward and forward (and, for Plato, upward) toward a larger, encompassing whole in an expansive, self-transcending movement.<sup>76</sup> As Plato well knew, and as Nehamas reminds us, this is the experience of love provoked by the beautiful.

In more hermeneutic terms, love is the proper mode of comportment toward the beautiful. Gadamer certainly recognizes this feature of Plato’s account: “whoever is unconsciously enraptured by passion is thereby directed toward something, spellbound by something that has come over one [...]. But it is always the beautiful, and never the ugly, which attracts.”<sup>77</sup> He likewise sees love as a passion that drives us to know and understand the beloved. For “love does not blind, but rather makes one see [... such that] one strives to see the other and let him be in his own true possibility. Hence there lies in the passion of love [...] an intellectual longing for the other which is the foundation for true love.”<sup>78</sup> So even if Gadamer does not use the words love or *erōs* in his account of our engagement with art, it is nonetheless implicit where he emphasizes how we are caught up by the work and find ourselves responsive and responsible to it, well before we can assess what this will mean for us. Addressed by the work, we respond to its claim upon us as a call that issues from the work itself and that calls us to understand what it says. In responding to this call we are therefore responsible to that claim as a claim to truth of the work itself. Gadamer speaks of this as an experience of being immersed in the artwork that he likens to “an intensive back-and-forth conversation that is not cut off but lasts until it is ended.”<sup>79</sup> As we have seen, to be completely absorbed in such a conversation with the work is what he also characterizes as participation in the work, a taking part by which one performs the work so that “it” comes forth. This is what he means by understanding and interpreting—namely, the active engagement with the work that enables the work to disclose itself in some essential aspect of its being. Where this happens, Gadamer speaks of an event or happening, a “sudden transformation,” in which the artwork comes to fulfillment *as* the unique work that it is.<sup>80</sup> When he wants to highlight the temporal dimension of our experience of art he speaks of “tarrying” (*Verweilen*) with the work.<sup>81</sup> Here it is principally a matter of participating in the presence of the work itself. In this way, Gadamer not only confirms what Nehamas briefly, but aptly, describes as a “call” of the beautiful artwork, but he deepens it by giving an ontological account of that experience. Gadamer also dampens Nehamas’s tendency to stress

the engagement with art as a subjective act by underscoring the activity of the “thing itself.” Our tarrying with the beautiful work is a response to its call.

I have also noted that Nehamas affiliates beauty with appearance, but refuses to identify appearance with what is immediately available to perception. So while he distances himself from those who, like Arthur Danto, locate beauty entirely on the surface of things he nevertheless maintains that beauty is never detached from appearance.<sup>82</sup> Nehamas also conceives appearance to include not just the purely visual aspects of something, but all of those features which we are aware of by looking. He also maintains that while beauty is always conveyed through appearance, it is never exhausted by it.<sup>83</sup> It is this aspect that leads Nehamas to claim that beauty issues a promise—ultimately, a promise of happiness. Although this promise is only held out to one who, absorbed in the work of art, attends expectantly to its beautiful appearance—that is, to one who loves it—that promise is nonetheless conveyed by the beautiful appearance of the work—that is, by the possibility that there are further aspects of the work to be disclosed, other appearances of itself to present. In the presence of a work that one finds beautiful he says “I feel that there is more about it that I would like to know.”<sup>84</sup> This is the “more” which Nehamas attributes to beauty and it marks the way in which the beautiful work of art exceeds any of its appearances—even if that beauty is to be found nowhere else. This “more” also introduces a temporal aspect into Nehamas’s account. By virtue of its promise “[b]eauty points to the future, and we pursue it without knowing what it will yield.” In a particularly poignant statement Nehamas asserts that “the measure of beauty lies not just in the past and the present but most of all its pledge for the future.”<sup>85</sup>

Gadamer also holds that the beautiful, especially in art, exceeds any of its appearances so that it is exhausted by none of them. However, he underscores another aspect of the “more” by which beauty attracts us and captures our attention by virtue of its appearance which nevertheless transcends us. For Gadamer too, as we have seen, beauty is a matter of appearance, but not if appearance is set in contrast with reality. Instead, he conceives appearance as an event of *appearing* in which the being of what appears is disclosed or, as he says, presents *itself*. This is especially evident with beauty for the being of the beautiful consists in the event of its appearing; the shining-forth of the beautiful is the appearing of being. What Nehamas characterizes as the promise of beauty Gadamer thus recasts as an ontological feature of the beautiful, of its actuality. The being of the beautiful is such that it always manifests itself through the self-disclosure of an artwork (or person or thing). The being of the artwork, in turn, exists only in the event of its self-presentation. On the one hand, this means that the artwork appears in some essential aspect that discloses its being; on the other hand, it means that the being of the artwork is never exhausted by any of the appearances by which it is disclosed. In the case of the artwork he therefore speaks of a “non-distinction” between presentation and presented, between what



is presented in the work and how it comes to presentation there.<sup>86</sup> Gadamer even asserts that what is presented undergoes an “increase of being” by virtue of its presentation. “With regard to knowledge of the true,” he says, “the being of the presentation is more than the being of the thing presented, Homer’s Achilles more than the original.”<sup>87</sup> What is brought forth in the presentation of the work offers an essential insight into what is presented there, which Gadamer does not hesitate to consider a knowing. Here the “more” is present in and through the work and not just promised by it.

What joins the two approaches is their hermeneutic orientation emphasizing the role of interpretation and appearance in our engagement with the beautiful in art; what separates them is Gadamer’s ontological account of that engagement. I propose to mediate between them by offering a rudimentary phenomenological framework for the experience of art that incorporates Nehamas’s account while providing the basis for Gadamer’s ontological turn. This framework consists in the phenomenological correlation between the experience of the beautiful and the appearance of the beautiful.<sup>88</sup> Nehamas is quite clear that the beautiful only appears to the lover. This is the deepest source of his allegiance to Plato: “Love, as Plato said, is beauty’s attendant and constant companion and has no place for ugliness.”<sup>89</sup> The beauty of a work of art strikes one and inspires the desire to approach it, to engage and to know it. At the same time, the work appears beautiful. Beauty does not appear without erotic desire, but love must be prompted by beautiful appearance; it is beauty that initiates and love that responds. Gadamer conceives the sudden occurrence of beauty as an event of presentation in which the work (person, thing) presents itself. Because he highlights the radiance of the beautiful as key to Plato’s conception, Gadamer grants ontological precedence to beauty over love. “Radiance, then, is not only one of the qualities of the beautiful but constitutes its actual being. The distinguishing mark of the beautiful—namely that it immediately attracts the desire of the human soul to it—is founded in its mode of being.”<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, the involvement of the spectator—the lover—is necessary in order for this event to take place. Following Heidegger, he occasionally characterizes this comportment as way of “dwelling” with the work of art or as a “letting-be” which enables the artwork to come forth. More frequently, however, he simply refers to it as interpretation, a “reading” that stays with the work until its elements suddenly come together as a unity that crystallizes into meaningful whole whose meaning can be understood.<sup>91</sup> Until this happens it does not yet appear as a work, but (in Nehamas’s words) merely as “[a] meaningless assemblage, a disparate collection of unrelated elements that serve no common purpose.”<sup>92</sup> But where the beautiful occurs in the artwork as an event of truth, it is not just the particularity of the work that addresses us but rather the totality of our world, our ontological place in it, and our finitude before what transcends us. Here too Gadamer sees in the experience of beauty a movement towards an encompassing whole that

echoes Diotima's ascent: "[T]he experience of the beautiful, and particularly the beautiful in art, is the invocation of a potentially whole and holy order of things, wherever it may be found."<sup>93</sup>

Although differences remain to be sorted out before one could fully integrate these two approaches, the common concerns shared between Nehamas and Gadamer provide powerful testimony to the possibility of renewing the Platonic correlation of love and beauty in a hermeneutic account that affirms the relevance of beauty in the world of art.

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## Notes

1. A. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 1–3.
2. H.-G. Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 412–14.
3. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 6.
4. H.-G. Gadamer *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 1989[1960]), 463–73.
5. Gadamer, *Gadamer Reader*, 311.
6. S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1966), 14. (Quoted in Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 121.)
7. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 121–2.
8. I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987[1790]), §§1–4.
9. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 3.
10. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §5.
11. However, Nehamas does not refuse to use the term “aesthetic” but absorbs it to the hermeneutic practice of interpretation. So despite his refusal to acknowledge a special class of aesthetic terms or qualities, he allows the term application “whenever language is used to say something relevant to the interpretation and so to the aesthetic value of things” (Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 51).
12. H.-G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Bernasconi, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 157.
13. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §§15–16.
14. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 136–46. But this criticism does not prevent Gadamer from appropriating Kant's discussion of imagination and aesthetic ideas for a

- hermeneutic understanding of art (cf. Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 157–70). For a further analysis of this issue see Daniel L. Tate, “Art as *Cognitio Imaginativa*, Gadamer on Intuition and Imagination in Kant’s Aesthetic Theory.” *Journal for the British Society of Phenomenology*, 40(1) (2009), 279–99.
15. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 71–4.
  16. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 10.
  17. *Ibid.*, 3.
  18. J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant and Heidegger to Adorno* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1992), 4.
  19. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 15.
  20. *Ibid.*, 22.
  21. Barnett Newman, “The Sublime Is Now.” *The Tiger’s Eye*, 6 (1948), 51. (Cited in Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 13.)
  22. *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 35
  23. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 71.
  24. *Ibid.*
  25. Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 19.
  26. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 74.
  27. *Ibid.*, 472.
  28. A. Nehamas, “‘Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living,’ Plato, *Symposium* 211d.” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 15(1) (2007): 8.
  29. In fact, the language of possession or acquisition (*ktêsis* or *einai* + dative) runs throughout this part of Socrates speech. See K. Corrigan and E. Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato’s Dialectic at Play: Argument Structure, and Myth in the Symposium* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 134. Having made this observation the authors go on to remark that “love ... remains self-interested even in its focus on the other ...” This, I think, also expresses Nehamas’s point.
  30. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 6.
  31. A. Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 311. In his introduction to the *Phaedrus* Nehamas emphasizes the role of sexual desire in Plato’s “highly revisionary account of pederasty” where the beautiful boy serves as an image of the beautiful, the true object of love that nourishes the soul (*ibid.*, 337–40).
  32. *Ibid.*, 311–12. Elsewhere he asserts that the beauty of what is surpassed in the ascent to the Form does not disappear, even if its brilliance diminishes. “Nothing that Plato has said so far implies that the philosophic lover discards the objects he meets on his way as he continues his ascent. That is as it should be” (Nehamas, “‘Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living,’” 5). Here too we find a basic agreement with Gadamer (H.-G. Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 134).
  33. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 7.
  34. *Ibid.*
  35. *Ibid.*, 53.

36. Ibid., 54.
37. Ibid., 55.
38. Ibid., 58.
39. Ibid., 62 (*italics original*).
40. Although Nehamas holds to Plato's strict correlation of love and beauty his assertion begs the question whether the ugly might not also, under certain conditions, inspire a similar response. At issue is whether or not the ugly *as ugly* may attract rather than repulse. In posing this question, however, we should not be too quick to absorb the ugly to the monstrous and (thereby) to the sublime which would then be set in contrast to the beautiful. For there is some evidence that the ancient Greek concept of *to kalon* oversteps the boundaries that delimit the beautiful from the sublime, at least in modern aesthetic theory where Kant's analysis of these two concepts would provide a relevant point of reference. It is perhaps pertinent here to cite the very first sentence of Nehamas's book: "All beautiful things, the Greek philosopher Plotinus wrote [...], produce "awe and a shock of delight, passionate longing, love and a shudder of rapture" (Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 1).
41. Ibid., 70.
42. Ibid., 24.
43. Ibid., 67.
44. Ibid., 126.
45. Ibid., 122.
46. Ibid., 41.
47. Ibid., 124.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., 125.
50. Ibid., 78.
51. Ibid., 126.
52. Ibid., 131.
53. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 122.
54. Ibid.
55. Gadamer, *Gadamer Reader*, 203.
56. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 481.
57. Ibid., 122.
58. While the radiance of beauty enjoys a certain privilege for Gadamer's retrieval of Plato insofar as it shows self-presentation to be definitive for the being of the beautiful, a full account would include the transcendence of the beautiful as a one that steps beyond being as well as the order and harmony that provides the beautiful with its appropriate measure. For a further discussion see Daniel L. Tate, "Renewing the Question of Beauty: Gadamer on Plato's Idea of the Beautiful." *Epochē* (forthcoming).
59. Ibid., 475–6.
60. Ibid., 476.

61. H.-G. Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in the Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986[1976]), 11.
62. Gadamer, *Gadamer Reader*, 311.
63. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 481.
64. M. Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth." In William McNeill (ed.) *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998[1967]), 155–82.
65. H.-G. Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*. Trans. John W. Stanley and intro. Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994[1983]), 87.
66. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 124.
67. Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful*, 25–6.
68. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 116.
69. Gadamer, *Gadamer Reader*, 215
70. *Ibid.*, 215.
71. Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*, 191.
72. Gadamer, *Gadamer Reader*, 214.
73. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 125–6.
74. *Ibid.*, 105.
75. *Ibid.*
76. "This forward-looking element in the perception of beauty, the sense that beautiful things are constantly drawing us further, is one of the great revelations of the *Symposium*. I have described the movement—the beckoning of beauty, the impetus of love—both as an absorbed immersion in the beautiful object itself and, simultaneously, an expanding vision of the world to which it belongs. Plato describes it as an ascent" (Nehamas, "Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living," 11).
77. Gadamer, *Gadamer Reader*, 306.
78. *Ibid.*, 309–10.
79. *Ibid.*, 211.
80. *Ibid.*, 187.
81. *Ibid.*, 211. For a further discussion of this aspect of Gadamer's account see Daniel L. Tate, "In the Fullness of Time: Gadamer on the Temporal Dimension of the Work of Art," *Research in Phenomenology*, 42(1) (2012), 92–113.
82. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 20–5. Here he addresses the position that Danto takes in *Abuse of Beauty* (A. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*. Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2003), 86–93).
83. *Ibid.*, 63.
84. *Ibid.*, 75.
85. *Ibid.*, 72.
86. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 134.
87. *Ibid.*, 114.
88. He even points out the phenomenological aspect of his account. "I would like to [...] see how much of what Plato says here can be read not just as an inspired (and

inspiring) flight of imagination but also as something we can actually believe—a solid, knowing and accurate description of the phenomenology of love and beauty” (Nehamas, “Only in the Contemplation of Beauty is Human Life Worth Living,” 1).

89. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 60 (Nehamas references Plato’s *Symposium* 203c).
90. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 477.
91. Gadamer, *Gadamer Reader*, 187–9.
92. Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 39.
93. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 32.

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