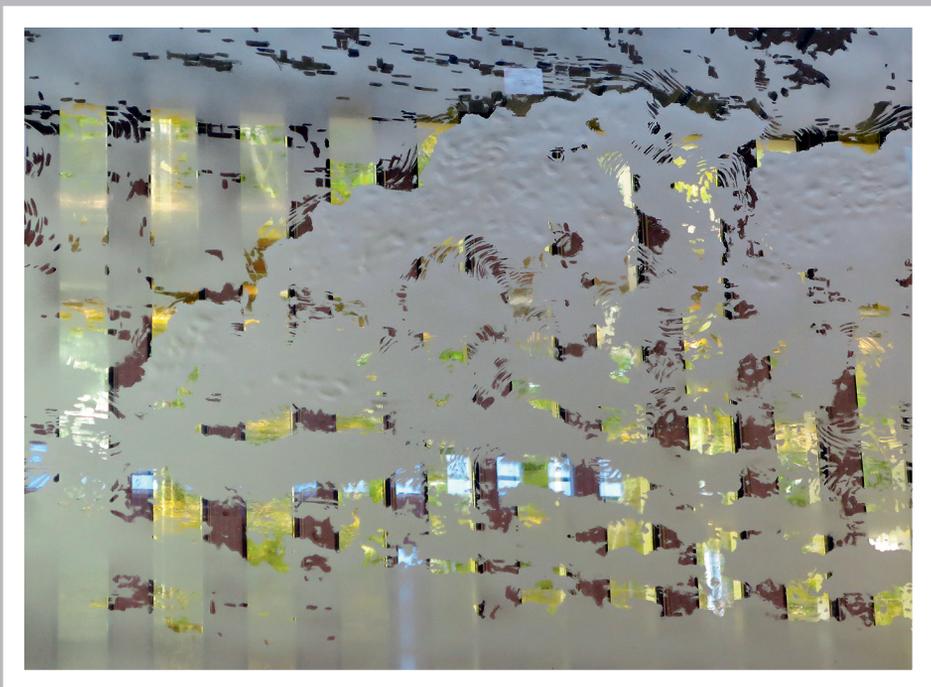


DEN SKØNNE TÆNKNING

*Veje til erfaringsmetafysik
Religionsfilosofisk udmøntet*



DORTHE JØRGENSEN

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Religionsfilosofisk udmøntet*

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Den skønne tænkning

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hos Narayana Press, Gylling

Omslag: Jørgen Sparre

Printed in Denmark 2014

ISBN 978-87-7124-364-2

Aarhus Universitetsforlag

Langelandsgade 177

8200 Århus N

www.unipress.dk

Bogen udgives med støtte fra

Aarhus Universitets Forskningsfond

Denne afhandling er af Akademisk Råd
ved Faculty of Arts, Aarhus Universitet,
antaget til forsvar for den teologiske doktorgrad.

Århus, den 11. februar 2014

Mette Thunø

Dekan

Forsvaret finder sted fredag den 21. marts 2014 kl. 13.00

i AIAS Auditorium, bygning 1632 (Høegh-Guldbergs Gade 6B), Aarhus Universitet

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English Summary

Brief version

This Danish-language publication entitled *Den skønne tænkning* (Beautiful Thinking), presents and interprets philosophical aesthetics, hermeneutic phenomenology, and the relationship between the two as pathways to *metaphysics of experience*. Against this background the book undertakes a religio-philosophical implementation to unfold a number of theological potentials in aesthetics and phenomenology that can form a basis for developing a *theological aesthetics* conceived in terms of metaphysics of experience. *Den skønne tænkning* opens with a Preface, followed by an Introduction that sets out the framework and discusses various issues of topical relevance to the book. Here the book's metaphysical-experiential and theological-aesthetic main concern is formulated in the context of a critical discussion both of today's aesthetics, understood as the study of arts, and of the predominance of anti-metaphysical thinking, that is, the current reluctance towards philosophical and theological thought. This is followed by four sections dealing with philosophical aesthetics and entitled (in an English rendition) »Baumgarten's aesthetics«, »Benjamin's metaphysics«, »Heidegger's phenomenology«, and »Contemporary Aesthetics«. Each section contains five chapters. Inset between these four sections the reader will also find four chapters dealing with Immanuel Kant's critique, his metaphysics, his aesthetics, and his relevance today. Taken together, these chapters constitute a separate section on Kant's philosophy. Finally, this first part of the book, which contains 24 chapters all in all, is rounded off in »Closing chapter on philosophical aesthetics«. Corresponding to an entire section, this chapter not only concludes the book's treatment of aesthetics, phenomenology, and critical philosophy, but also

revisits the discussions in the Introduction and places them in the perspective light of the older philosophy of beauty, which theological aesthetics must take into consideration and perhaps even benefit from in a new interpretation. After unveiling the above-mentioned pathways to metaphysics of experience, the book moves on to »Religio-philosophical implementation«, which contains 16 chapters and corresponds roughly in size to three of the sections on philosophical aesthetics. This part of the book, dealing with the philosophy of religion, is divided into three subsections which, unlike the sections on philosophical aesthetics, are not provided with independent titles, but only separated graphically. The reason for this is that, despite their differences, the subsections in »Religio-philosophical implementation« are intimately related: They represent a progressive movement from the introduction of theological aesthetics in the first part of this section, through various considerations about the relationship between theology and the philosophy of beauty in the second part, to an explicit collocation of theology and metaphysics of experience in the third part. Finally, the book contains two appendices, a bibliography, a name index and a title index, in addition to the present summaries in Danish, German, and English.

The first section in *Den skønne tænkning* presents Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's aesthetics as an alternative logic and epistemology with a neo-metaphysical perspective. Baumgarten's introduction of philosophical aesthetics is presented in this section based on its context within the history of ideas as they stood in the 1700s, and with a view to art philosophy's and the study of arts' dethroning of aesthetics by subsequent generations. Continuing along these lines, the next section shows how Walter Benjamin, with his proposal for a philosophy of 'higher experience', offered a new interpretation of the metaphysics handed down, and it demonstrates how his later ideas on thinking, beauty, and aesthetic experience cohered with this. Benjamin continued to work on a revised Kantian foundation, taking over where Baumgarten had left off. He worded a philosophical aesthetics for the twentieth century, and in so doing drew closer to metaphysics of experience. In similar fashion the section on Martin Heidegger shows that he, too, formulated a new metaphysics that was more deeply rooted in experience than traditional metaphysics, also demonstrating that despite Heidegger's aversion to philosophical aesthetics, the nature of this metaphysics leaned towards the phi-

losophy of aesthetics. Both Benjamin and Heidegger brought philosophical aesthetics into the topical realm, thereby reinterpreting metaphysics for their own day and age instead of rejecting it. Against this backdrop, the section entitled »Contemporary Aesthetics« gives striking examples of philosophies from the last two decades that explicitly relate to philosophical aesthetics, and more specifically relate to Baumgarten and his concept of sensitive cognition. Although several of the philosophers mentioned in the relevant section attempt to revitalise Baumgarten's legacy, they generally find the concept of metaphysics problematic. Nevertheless, the section also demonstrates that these theoretical thinkers would benefit from seeking differentiation in the concept of metaphysics – in that this could strengthen aesthetics as *philosophical* aesthetics. Furthermore, it shows the distinction between traditional and new metaphysics observable in Benjamin and in Heidegger, harking back to Kant, with whom both Benjamin and Heidegger as well as contemporary aesthetics philosophers have had an ongoing critical dialogue. This is also why Kant plays a prominent role in *Den skønne tænkning*. Indeed, the chapters on Kant's thinking show that with his aesthetics he was already moving beyond a position dealing merely with a critique of metaphysics, for it also forms a pathway to metaphysics of experience. Kant's critical philosophy therefore has more in common with hermeneutic phenomenology than is normally perceived when studying the phenomenologists' critique of him. Additionally, it has more in common with Baumgarten than Kant's own critique of Baumgarten's aesthetics would admit. The metaphysics formulated by Benjamin and Heidegger based on a critique of metaphysics was aesthetic in its character; but inversely, early philosophical aesthetics already contained the seed that could germinate into a new and different kind of metaphysics – not only in Baumgarten's work, but precisely in Kant's work as well.

Rather than setting up faith and reason as opposites, as for instance the logical positivists did, Benjamin wished to unite philosophy and theology through an expansion of philosophical thinking. He sought to embrace religious experience; that is, not merely having something to say about empirical experience and intellectual cognition, but also about faith. Similarly, over the last few decades various thinkers in the United States and Europe have attempted to dissolve the oppositions between faith and sense perception by expanding theology, which must be able to embrace not only art, but

also beauty and aesthetic experience. The first part of »Religio-philosophical implementation« serves the purpose of creating a basis for understanding this development. It therefore deals not only with the Death of God theology of the twentieth century, but also with the questioning of the secularization theory that comes later. Modernity is not necessarily accompanied by secularism: on the contrary, analogous to the above-mentioned transformation of metaphysics, it could result in a new interpretation of religion – its legacy of thought and its significance. The first part of »Religio-philosophical implementation« further introduces the often conflictual relationship between theology and aesthetics in the modern era, and also describes the advent of new disciplines called ‘religious aesthetics’, ‘theological aesthetics’, and ‘aesthetic theology’. Against this background the second part delves into the relationship between theology and the philosophy of beauty, discussing among other things the sense theory of K.E. Løgstrup and his and Eberhard Jüngel’s understanding of beauty, and introducing, for instance, the aesthetic theology of Klaas Huizing. Moreover, the modern perception of beauty as ‘harmonistic’ is critically discussed, as is, by extension, today’s widespread tendency to oppose the beautiful and the sublime. These introductions and discussions not only make use of, and reprocess, thought treated in the previous sections on philosophical aesthetics, such as Benjamin’s understanding of beauty and Baumgarten’s understanding of the aesthetic experience. Like the first part of »Religio-philosophical implementation«, this second part also employs and introduces a variety of thought of a theological aesthetic nature, contributed by the likes of Eugenio Trías and Jean-Louis Chrétien. This thought is also profiled in the third part, in which key concepts in the metaphysics of experience, such as *the intermediate world*, *world poetry*, and *the experience of immanent transcendence*, are set in focus. Here, thoughts arising from philosophy of aesthetics and theological aesthetics are employed to reflect upon the openness of the intermediate world and the meaning of a surplus of meaning, as well as the aesthetics of prayer and the relationship between faith and reason. Likewise, these thoughts are also pursued in order to establish that sensation, faith, and comprehension are equiprimordial aspects of the same basic experience, and to interpret as a gift the absolutely fundamental attention required for any experience: It is a prerequisite for our own attention upon what we are experiencing that we ourselves are the

object of attention. This is the theological consequence of the dismissing of dualist philosophy of mind that is exercised by aesthetics and phenomenology.

Background

In *Skønhedens metamorfose* (The Metamorphosis of Beauty) from 2001, I made the important point that philosophical aesthetics has never actually been realized, 'made real' – although parts of it *have* been realized, mainly in Germany and Italy. Historically, philosophical aesthetics has been pushed aside, first in favour of the philosophy of art, and then in favour of the methodical study of arts rooted in art theory. So it is that Denmark, the Nordic region, and the English-speaking countries all have a rich tradition for *art theory*, understood as theory that deals with art or artefacts, and which places emphasis on the artwork's or artefact's formal language. Within the framework of the study of arts much research anchored in art theory is done in the fields of art, literature, theatre, and music, and also in new areas such as digital art. However, Denmark and the Nordic and English-speaking countries lack a well-developed tradition of *philosophical aesthetics*, understood as a philosophical investigation into what Baumgarten referred to as sensitive cognition, by which he understood aesthetic experience proper (as opposed to aesthetic impression). Philosophy as a profession has shown very little interest in aesthetics, typically reaching no further than art philosophy in the sense of examining philosophically the fundamental nature of art. Correspondingly, aesthetics usually also becomes something other than philosophical aesthetics when, today, the study of arts ventures to move its gaze from the artwork or the artefact over to the experience to which art and other things can give rise. When this happens, most frequently the result is, for example, social theory informed by sociology and cultural analysis in the shape of cultural studies, and in practice the main focus of interest is largely aesthetic impressions rather than aesthetic experiences proper. Continuing along these lines, *Den skønne tænkning* goes on to conclude that Denmark and the Nordic region not only suffer from a lack of philosophical aesthetics, but are also lacking in *theological aesthetics*, although admittedly international attempts have been made to develop such thinking. Current obstacles to a Danish or Nordic theological aesthetics are not limited to the problematic identification,

mentioned previously, of aesthetics with the study of arts – that is, methodical study grounded in art theory. They also arise from a widespread perception that, in a Nordic context, an ‘aesthetic turn’ has already taken place. In fact, a *poetic theology* was introduced in Denmark as early as the 1970s. However, it did not enter into dialogue with philosophical aesthetics, nor did it term *itself* aesthetics, and the traces it has left behind are modest at best. Usually the above-mentioned perception of an already realized aesthetic turn refers instead to *narrative theology*, which became popular during the 1980s, or to the interest in the relationship between *art* and *Christianity* that also spread during that period. Nevertheless, these directions of thought did not take a position on philosophical aesthetics either, much less did they attempt to systematically anchor themselves within it. They did not take an interest in aesthetic experience, understood as sensitive cognition, and its theological potential, but were interested in the significance that the narrative and specific works of art held for Christianity.

Generally speaking, neither Danish nor Nordic theologians suddenly discovered philosophical aesthetics at the dawn of the 1980s. Many began to take an interest in art (including literature or aesthetic artefacts broadly speaking, or alternatively in the aesthetic in the Kierkegaardian sense), becoming preoccupied with the relationship between art and Christianity. The relationship between theology and aesthetics, on the other hand, remained largely unexplored, and consequently there is still no Danish or Nordic theological aesthetics understood as this: a philosophy of religion anchored in philosophical aesthetics, which focuses on religious experience and has an eye for the immanent link between philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology and for the theological significance of beauty. Even internationally this sort of theological aesthetics hardly exists, despite the fact that over the past 20 to 30 years scholars have been working intensely in the United States and Europe to develop not only *theological aesthetics*, but also *aesthetics of religion* and *aesthetic theology*. On the contrary, well into the twentieth century, theology itself obstructed the recognition of the potential significance of aesthetics for theological thinking. This was due, among other things, to the Protestant theologians’ insistence on the incomparability of faith, and their associated rejection of any suggestion of a possible parallelism between faith and reason. Another factor was that not least the dialectic

theologians of the twentieth century harboured suspicions and reservations concerning experience – an absolutely key concept to aesthetics – as they felt the very word had connotations of pietistic sentimentality, which caused them to oppose experience with revelation. Experience was regarded as something that emanates from the human being, whereas the term revelation referred to God's own revealing of Himself. Finally, many theologians have ignored aesthetics, felt ambivalent towards it, or even rejected it due to a fear of subjectivist relativism, and to the circumstance that theology has not distinguished between aesthetics (understood as philosophy) and the aesthetic (understood as aesthetic impression). However, the theological discourse of the Middle Ages already contained thoughts the nature of which was potentially related to philosophical aesthetics, not least within the framework of the metaphysics of beauty existing at that time. Conversely, the philosophical aesthetics of the modern era is studded with thought that is either decidedly theological or has a potential for being interpreted in theological terms. Note that the reason for this intimate connection between aesthetics and theology is *not* that philosophical aesthetics is 'merely' theology clad in the garb of the secular, or that aesthetics is a substitute for theology. On the contrary, the reason is that early philosophical aesthetics topicalized certain elements present both in art theory and in the traditional metaphysics of beauty, and with the latter came elements from theology. It made these elements topical in a new and different form – which was more along the lines of philosophy of experience.

As noted earlier, however, today methodical study based on art theory dominates within the study of arts, whereas philosophical aesthetics is blatantly absent. At most, one might come across philosophical thought in the form of art philosophy – and even this art philosophy is typically analytical in nature, and therefore does not qualify as *philosophia*. In like manner, the aesthetics of religion takes up far more space within the field of theology than either aesthetic theology or theological aesthetics does. Clearly, both the Danish and the international literature are characterized by a preponderance of studies dealing with religious artefacts (as opposed to religious experience), and based on thought in terms of art theory (and not of philosophical aesthetics). The methodology applied in such studies has been imported from the study of arts, which thereby prevails in yet another field, namely the field of

theology. Theology itself, on the other hand, profits less, and does not benefit at all from the theoretical developments that philosophical aesthetics could contribute. If theology *is* to be able to benefit from philosophical aesthetics, it is necessary that there actually *is* a philosophical aesthetics with which it can dialogue. In other words: Aesthetics must finally be realized, in the sense of being ‘made real’. But as demonstrated in *Den skønne tænkning*, such realization cannot merely consist of reproducing philosophical aesthetics in its original form. On the contrary, it must take on the form of an actualization of the potentials that can be identified in early aesthetics. The reasons for the latter observation are, firstly, that Baumgarten introduced philosophical aesthetics as a philosophy about the cognitive faculties involved in sensitive cognition, and about the rules for our use of these faculties – meaning the rules that apply to thinking beautifully – and secondly, that such an approach, based on a philosophy of cognitive faculties, is no longer defensible. It is, on the other hand, both meaningful and necessary to topicalize the philosophical interest in the experience of transcendence, which the aesthetics Baumgarten founded also expressed, given that it dealt with a different kind of cognition than the intellectual cognition treated in the field of logic. *Den skønne tænkning* shows how sensitive cognition, which is at issue in philosophical aesthetics, can by means of critical philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology be interpreted as a metaphysical insight into our possibility of experiencing transcendence, and as an insight into what this possibility means for us as human beings. This book further shows that philosophical investigations into this experiential phenomenology can promote new development in many fields, theology for instance, by contributing an experiential dimension which otherwise remains lacking.

Meanwhile, this last point makes it necessary to revise our understanding of experience. The experiential phenomenology with which metaphysics of experience is concerned exists at a level *prior* to the constituting of subject and object. If this experiential world is to be investigated in terms of metaphysics of experience, and if this investigation is to be expressed in terms of the philosophy of religion, we must necessarily enlarge the concept of experience. This concept must be revised so that we cease to equate it, by definition, with sensory experience, empirical experience, or at best perhaps life experience. Put differently, we must cease to automatically regard experiencing as an

activity that is performed by a subject and involves a thing that has the status of an object. On the contrary, the word 'experience' must (also) be applicable to something that *occurs* – that happens to someone who, in this situation, is not the subject of something, but is rather the object of the *event* which this experience constitutes. The conception of experience that is formulated and applied in *Den skønne tænkning* is precisely of this nature. Philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology were already interested in the experiential world to which this conception of experience is linked. However, both were restricted in their access to it – aesthetics because of its origin in the philosophy of cognitive faculties and phenomenology because of its aversion to aesthetics. Nevertheless, because the approach of metaphysics of experience is rooted both in the philosophy of aesthetics and in hermeneutic phenomenology, it is able to shed a different light on, for example, aesthetic and religious experience, thereby also shedding light on cognition and faith. More specifically, metaphysics of experience can lead us, and even spur us, to the actualization of potentials not-yet-realized in the existing traditions of philosophical and theological thought. For one thing, it can show us how the interest of past eras in reflecting on beauty and the beautiful as an *idea* (which, in theological terms, was the beauty of God and/or Creation) was transformed with the advent of aesthetics into an investigation of beauty as an *experience*. In addition, it can point forward to how this shift in focus from idea to experience can be transferred to theology, the result of which would be to have an eye for perceiving *the encounter with the divine* rather than fixating on divinity as such, or to have an eye for perceiving faith understood as *a way of being in the world* rather than faith as what is believed. Metaphysics of experience can show us that aesthetics can contribute to theology a nearness to the experience, *without* theology as a discipline being emptied of theology. Aesthetics – with its philosophical topicalization of something that theology itself was in former times, namely a metaphysics of beauty – provides theology with an opportunity to benefit from theology's own tradition; and more specifically, to benefit from a facet of that tradition that has largely fallen into oblivion.

Extended version

In the book *Skønhedens metamorfose* (The Metamorphosis of Beauty) from 2001, and also in subsequent writings such as *Historien som værk* (History as a Work) and *Skønhed – En engel gik forbi* (Beauty – An Angel Passed By), both from 2006, as well as *Aglaias dans* (Aglaias Dance) from 2008, I have attempted to create an awareness of philosophical aesthetics in the Nordic region. Not only did these works show what philosophical aesthetics is from a historical and systematic point of view. Nor did they merely explain how philosophical aesthetics has been set aside in favour of first art philosophy and later the methodical study of arts anchored in art theory. Besides doing these things, they also argued that there is a need to realize, to ‘make real’, the possibility that was introduced with the foundation of philosophical aesthetics in the mid-eighteenth century, and that such a realization must result in a *metaphysics of experience*. Against this background, the sections of *Den skønne tænkning* dealing with philosophical aesthetics present and interpret Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s philosophical aesthetics, Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy, Walter Benjamin’s modern metaphysics, Martin Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, and various current theories of aesthetics as pathways leading to metaphysics of experience. Viewed in this light, these thinkers contribute to the realization of beautiful thinking – which is what aesthetics is and deals with, if one takes the word aesthetics to mean *philosophical* aesthetics. Admittedly, the thoughts of these thinkers do not yet constitute a metaphysics of experience. They do point in that direction, however, and can therefore be used for developing metaphysics of experience. In other words, Baumgarten’s philosophical aesthetics, Kant’s critical philosophy, Benjamin’s modern metaphysics, Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, and the present-day theories of aesthetics mentioned above all contain elements that can be adapted as part of developing a philosophy, the primary object of which is the experiential phenomenology – in *Den skønne tænkning* referred to as *the intermediate world* – of aesthetic, religious, and metaphysical experiences. To mention just one example: According to Baumgarten, aesthetics is the philosophy of what he called sensitive cognition and of the kind of beautiful thinking and aesthetic truth associated with this type of cognition. By this Baumgarten meant cognition, thinking and truth that are metaphysical in nature, but in a way that differs from traditional meta-

physics. His philosophical aesthetics implied a new kind of metaphysics, the basis of which was human experience rather than metaphysical ideas – experience being understood here as a sort of metaphysical experience, that is, an experience of transcendence that brings insight. At the same time, however, Baumgarten's thought was constituted as a dualist philosophy of mind. The form it took was a philosophy of cognitive faculties, which did lean towards shattering the subject/object paradigm but was prevented from doing so by its rationalist origins. Consequently, a potential attempt to realize philosophical aesthetics cannot take the shape of a simple reproduction of the original aesthetics. Rather, aesthetics must be topicalized, resulting in a metaphysics of experience.

So we can regard both philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology, as well as, for example, critical philosophy as pathways leading to metaphysics of experience without themselves being fully unfolded metaphysics of experience. Yet if we are to formulate a metaphysics of experience, it is not enough for us to concern ourselves with, say, aesthetics and phenomenology. We must also consider the interrelationship between these philosophical schools. Precisely such consideration is therefore an important task in *Den skønne tænkning*. The relationship between aesthetics and phenomenology must be investigated because the hermeneutic phenomenology of the twentieth century approximated a realization of philosophical aesthetics, but without being aware that it was doing so. Because of the historical transformation of aesthetics from philosophical aesthetics to methodical study of arts anchored in art theory, hermeneutic phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer did not acknowledge phenomenology's origin in philosophical aesthetics. Quite the opposite: they rejected aesthetics – in favour of phenomenology. At the same time, however, in practice these phenomenologists 'reinvented' aesthetics – as phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology therefore has a historical source, hitherto largely overlooked, in philosophical aesthetics. What is more, hermeneutic phenomenology can thank not only itself, but aesthetics as well, for its being able to, and indeed for its having to, 'reinvent' aesthetics as phenomenology. The point is, Baumgarten's philosophical aesthetics already contained phenomenological and hermeneutic elements, and it therefore in itself pointed forward, towards the hermeneutic phenomenology of posterity. Thus, *Den*

skønne tænkning elucidates the relationship between philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology by revealing and explaining the double movement from aesthetics to phenomenology, which is characterized by both dismantling and development. In this movement, phenomenology has not only ‘reinvented’ aesthetics as phenomenology. At the same time, aesthetics itself has ‘presaged’ phenomenology. In more specific terms, aesthetics and phenomenology share an interest in what is unique about the particular, and an interest in a non-reductive version of the classical thought about unity in variety. Also, they both present the particular as something that participates in the universal but does so through holding the universal, whereby the particular points beyond itself without losing itself.

The investigation of *Den skønne tænkning* into the relationship between philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology also exposes a number of links between Baumgarten’s aesthetics and Kant’s aesthetics, and between Kant’s philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology. On the face of it, Kant’s aesthetics looks very different from Baumgarten’s aesthetics – and Kant himself viewed it as such. Kant can, nevertheless, be read in terms of philosophical aesthetics as someone akin to the phenomenologists. This puts him closer to Baumgarten, whose aesthetics (as mentioned earlier) already contained hermeneutic and phenomenological elements. This sort of kinship between Kant and phenomenology is detectable even though phenomenologists and hermeneutic thinkers such as Heidegger and Gadamer took great pains to distance themselves from the dualist philosophy of mind that he was seen as expressing. Furthermore, Kant was an important ally and opponent for Benjamin, who, unlike Heidegger, admittedly rejected phenomenology, but who actually focused on *phainomena* himself, and who did this precisely with a view to the *noumena* given with them; in other words, with a view to the transcendence in immanence, and to the cognition associated with sensitivity. Benjamin perceived his philosophy as hermeneutic, but in practice it was also phenomenological, and by virtue of its phenomenological nature it was aesthetic as well. *Den skønne tænkning* shows how Benjamin developed philosophical aesthetics, more specifically the phenomenological and hermeneutic side of aesthetics without himself calling the results of his efforts aesthetic or phenomenological. Incidentally, his thought, which actualized philosophical potentials given in and by the philosophical aesthetics

introduced by Baumgarten, plays a significant role in *Den skønne tænkning*, not only for idea-historical reasons, but very notably as a significant way-station in the genesis of the metaphysics of experience. Generally speaking, Benjamin's philosophy and thought is a great source of inspiration for the metaphysics of experience, including the investigations presented in this book, not least for the perspectives applied in its interpretations. For example, *Den skønne tænkning* draws on material and resources that are extremely varied. But the adhesive that binds together the formulated reflections is philosophical in nature, and it consists more specifically of that which, according to Benjamin, qualifies philosophical thinking: immersing oneself in the phenomena and concentrating on discerning the ideas that 'inhabit' them, not seeing them as fully and finally formed entities, but as *possibilities of cognition* that are realized by philosophy – the medium of which is the concept.

Although the study of arts, and along with it art theory, remain predominant, recent decades have seen the growth of a new philosophical aesthetics, most notably in Germany but also sporadically in the United States and elsewhere. The pathway from philosophical aesthetics, as Baumgarten conceived it, to metaphysics of experience must also necessarily wend its way round this contemporary aesthetics, as represented by thinkers like Gernot Böhme, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Christoph Menke, Martin Seel, Richard Shusterman, and Wolfgang Iser. Therefore the thought of these theoreticians of aesthetics is also an object of discussion in *Den skønne tænkning*. Their treatment bears in mind the question of how contemporary aesthetics actually conceives of the relationship between intellect (understanding) and sense perception, or between reason and feeling. Do theoreticians of aesthetics, like those mentioned above, immerse themselves in the aesthetic experience, understood as sensitive cognition, or do they, conversely, reduce the experience to sensory experience? Does the aesthetics that they formulate avoid breaking off its course before (ever) reaching the cognition that formed the foundation upon which aesthetics arose in the 1700s, namely that there exists some third factor, in addition to and beyond intellect and sense perception, that plays a decisive role in human cognition? Or are they themselves mired down in the dichotomies of those days – intellect versus sense perception, reason versus feeling – despite the current and contemporary quality that otherwise char-

acterizes their thought? Several of the aesthetic theoreticians mentioned here feel an association with phenomenology, drawing philosophical thought into their work, and for several of them Benjamin's philosophy also plays a noteworthy role. Both for this reason and because of the above-mentioned links between aesthetics in its original form and hermeneutic phenomenology, this book's discussion of current aesthetics also asks: Just how phenomenological is it, *de facto*? Are present-day theoreticians of aesthetics concerned with the world of phenomena, or on the contrary, are things just objects to them? Is phenomenology as practised by them merely a question of describing, or is their interest in describing motivated by a wish to *understand*? This can be reworded as the question: Do contemporary theoreticians focus on transcendence in the immanence, the cognition associated with sensitivity, or do they instead reject any idea whatsoever of *noumena*? How faithful are they to philosophical aesthetics, and how far have they come on the pathway to metaphysics of experience?

Both aesthetics and phenomenology put behind them the hope of traditional metaphysics, i.e. the hope of being able to fathom or provide proof for something transcendent. Still, they have not denied the possibility of experience of transcendence, but have, rather, been deeply involved in precisely this kind of experience and in its significance for us as human beings. However, the experiences categorized as religious by the philosophy of religion also belong within the register of experiences of transcendence in which we find, for instance, the experience of beauty that Baumgarten understood as aesthetic, or the experience of Being that Heidegger thematically treated as phenomenological. Like aesthetics and phenomenology, the philosophy of religion deals not only with the experience of transcendence; in addition, today's philosophy of religion shows more of a tendency to reflect upon religious experience than to pursue such activities as arguing ontologically to prove the existence of God. This last observation does not mean, however, that the actual wish to present such proof has disappeared. On the contrary, many philosophers of religion continue this practice, but now do so standing on an 'empiristic' foundation; and because they employ a narrow concept of experience, their efforts (unintentionally) result in the reproduction of a traditional metaphysical way of thinking. To this very day, the word experience is most often used to denote sensory experience, empirical experience,

or at best life experience, and the experience proper is even confused quite frequently with an impression. Offering a different approach, which takes a firm footing in aesthetics, phenomenology, and notably Benjamin's work, *Den skønne tænkning* insists on employing an *enlarged* concept of experience. Furthermore, this book enables not only philosophy but also theology to benefit from a revised concept of experience, which basically has to do with understanding the experience of transcendence as the experience of a surplus of meaning. More specifically: It is a type of experience which has no subject, and which therefore has no object either. The point is that the experience *occurs*, and it does not occur in the subject but rather in the above-mentioned *intermediate world*, where things are not the object of an experience, but are solely *occasions* of experience. In other words, the experience takes place *before* any subject or object is constituted; it does not depend on any subject as such, but on subjectivity understood as *presence*. It is just such a new and different understanding of what experience actually *is* that is needed for us to move beyond the subject/object-structured thinking that has characterized both liberal theology and dialectic theology. Whereas liberal theology prioritized the human aspect (experience in the traditional sense) to the detriment of the divine aspect (that of revelation), and whereas dialectic theology conversely prioritized revelation to the detriment of everything human, it becomes possible through a new and different conception of experience – according to which experience is not something that we do, but something that happens to us – to focus instead on the very relationship between God and the human being.

The reader can already begin to infer, in the sections of *Den skønne tænkning* that deal with the philosophy of aesthetics, something that becomes quite clear in the book's chapters on the philosophy of religion: that a religio-philosophical implementation based on a legacy of thought from philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology is a logical outcome from topicalizing aesthetics and updating it to our time. There is much in both aesthetics and phenomenology that is specifically theological in nature and so has the potential for being developed theologically. The considerations that appear in the religio-philosophical chapters of *Den skønne tænkning* and which deal, among other things, with theological aesthetics and therefore also treat issues such as *prayer* and *faith* are not a theological superstructure

or religious supplement to, but rather an immanent consequence of thinking that is already contained in, and actually is central to, philosophical aesthetics and the hermeneutic phenomenology related to aesthetics. Aesthetics and phenomenology provide us with, among other things, something different and something more than art philosophy founded on theory of sense perception – the latter being what perhaps in Danish and Nordic theology is most readily available today because of the interest over recent years in K.E. Løgstrup. From a philosophical-aesthetic point of view, aesthetic experience is *not* identical with sense perception, *nor* should aesthetics be equated with art philosophy. This early observation already disqualifies art philosophy founded on theory of sense perception as aesthetics, and naturally by inference also disqualifies it as theological aesthetics. However, aesthetics and theology can be integrated in a stronger fashion, namely, as a theological aesthetics that not only is inspired by phenomenology, but also and at the same time is anchored in philosophical aesthetics. And this is exactly the concern in the religio-philosophical implementation of philosophical-aesthetic and hermeneutic-phenomenological thought that is carried out in *Den skønne tænkning*. This implementation focuses in religio-philosophical terms on the experience of transcendence, which, thanks to the implementation having a foothold in philosophical aesthetics, can be understood not just as the event that hermeneutic phenomenology gives us the possibility of conceiving it as. The foothold in philosophical aesthetics at the same time makes it possible to profile the sensitive aspect – as opposed to the sensual aspect – of the event in question. Furthermore, this philosophical-aesthetic anchoring gives an access to the realm of beauty, by which beauty appears neither as a quality in certain objects nor as a private, casual impression, but rather as a personally framed experience of common human value. Reiterated in terms of metaphysics of experience, the overall result is a focus on the experience of a surplus of meaning that is not subjectively controlled and does not consist of object identification, and which, precisely for that reason, can give rise to philosophy of religion, *in casu* theological aesthetics, which can contribute to new developments in theology by re-establishing the connection between theology and experience.

One argument supporting the relevance of theological aesthetics conceived in terms of metaphysics of experience is the following: The general

public's interest in religion has exploded over recent years, but theology is experiencing a crisis; it is religious studies that is reaping the benefits of this interest. A possible solution to this problem consists in shifting theological thought closer to the experience, and indeed, metaphysics of experience can be conducive to the religio-philosophical development that such a shift would require. This could help theology to once again find a foothold in the religious experiences of modern human beings, without finding itself taking a sentimental or dogmatic approach. Not only does metaphysics of experience interpret anew the experience of transcendence that philosophical aesthetics refers to as aesthetic experience (originally sensitive cognition), but which theology and philosophy, for instance, also have discussed as religious experience and metaphysical experience. The key concepts of metaphysics of experience also include theologically relevant concepts such as the *experience of divinity* and the *experience of immanent transcendence*. Like philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology, metaphysics of experience thus contains a theological potential that can be actualized through the development of theological aesthetics. A precondition for the latter is, however, that by the term 'theological aesthetics' we understand the type of theological thinking which is anchored in philosophical aesthetics and inspired by phenomenology; which immerses itself investigatively in the phenomenology and the existential significance of religious experience; and which examines a variety of issues, including how faith can be understood against this background. In other words, although in modern times it has been quite common to set up philosophy and theology as opposites, it turns out that aesthetics, phenomenology, and metaphysics of experience can contribute to the philosophy of religion and therefore also to theology – for instance by offering qualified contributions to current international endeavours to develop theological aesthetics. Certainly, the modern era's oppositional positioning of philosophy and theology relies on a sort of reductionism to which aesthetics and phenomenology, as well as metaphysics of experience, are precisely created to serve as critical alternatives. This ostensibly oppositional relationship has its roots in the modern era's consigning of faith to the narrow realms of dogmatism or fancy, and to an analogous confining of reason to the realm of understanding. However, *Den skønne tænkning* pursues the discussion of aesthetics and of phenomenology by arguing in

terms of metaphysics of experience that faith and reason are equiprimordial, or to put it more specifically: that our basic experience as human beings is characterized by an equal originality of *sensation*, *faith* and *comprehension*. The words philosophy and theology may well denote different things, but at the same time philosophical thought and theological thought do have many things in common, such as their interest in dealing with the *meta*-physical.

Theology deals, by definition, with something that is transcendent and therefore inscrutable, whereas philosophy aspires to cognition. Meanwhile, if in discussing these disciplines one uses the term 'philosophy' to denote the *philosophia* that was the form in which philosophy was originally introduced – and this is what *Den skønne tænkning* does – then philosophical thinking is controlled by reason rather than understanding. Then philosophy seeks not intellectual cognition, but *insight*. It is for this very reason that philosophy is not forced to refrain from co-thinking (symphilosophizing) with theology, even though it is obliged to question everything, including its own potential answers to theological questions. This is, by the way, a precondition that theology itself shares with philosophy, given that theology was originally introduced as a method of critically examining the mythology of the time, i.e. the teachings about the Greek gods. More specifically, philosophy and theology share the common premise that it is not possible by means of understanding to cognitively acknowledge anything transcendent, while it is, indeed, possible to gain insight by reason into the experience of transcendence and its significance to us as human beings. So both philosophy and theology are characterized by being more comprehensive in nature than our highly-specialized, modern-day scholarly disciplines. They do not wish to limit themselves to examining or relating to that which is accessible to the physical senses and to understanding. They go beyond what is empirically given, and both are therefore an expression of reason (as opposed to intellect/understanding). In truth, one point that is made by *Den skønne tænkning* is that intellectually-controlled, analytical thinking must be combined with a reasoned mode of thinking that can reconnect what is analytically divided, for instance in order to avoid the scientism caused by an excessive eagerness to comply with current demands of (hard) science in all fields. Yet at the same time another point in *Den skønne tænkning* – indeed one of its most salient points – is that this activity of thinking reasonably necessitates aesthetic

thinking, meaning *enlarged thinking*. Aesthetic sensitivity is a precondition for enabling reason to unfold, and therefore also a prerequisite for the type of interaction between intellect and reason necessary to systematic reflection on the immeasurable. It takes imagination to place oneself mentally within an unknown context, and to envision something that is not empirically given; and so reason's transcendence necessitates imagination. What is more, this overstepping movement that reason makes in the mind must be of such a nature that one's eye for that which was overstepped is not neglected, and this calls for sensitivity, as opposed to intellect or physical sensing. The aesthetically expanded mode of thinking is special precisely because it is capable of keeping things together which, otherwise, we have a tendency to split apart and position opposite one another. It prefigures the kind of thinking led by reason that *Den skønne tænkning* seeks to promote, because such thinking is more 'holistic' – yielding a better, fuller picture of the whole – than thinking that is controlled by the intellect alone.

*Translated by Heidi Flegal, Dorte Jørgensen,
and Edward Broadbridge*

*Måske begynder vort vågne liv i fornemmelse, tro og forståelse?
Måske æstetik, teologi og filosofi er tre sider af samme sag?*

Den skønne tænkning er den første systematiske formulering af erfaringsmetafysik. Bogen beskriver grundlaget for en filosofi om æstetisk, religiøs og metafysisk erfaring. *Den skønne tænkning* er også den mest omfattende undersøgelse af forholdet mellem filosofisk æstetik og hermeneutisk fænomenologi. På internationalt plan bidrager forfatteren ved at omsætte filosofisk æstetik i erfaringsmetafysik og give den teologiske æstetik et filosofisk grundlag. Samtidig er bogen den første samlede fremstilling i Norden af teologisk æstetik og det mest tilbundsgående arbejde med filosofisk æstetik.

Den skønne tænkning baner nye tankeveje – i både teologi og humaniora. Bogen kulminerer i tanker om et univers af gensidig opmærksomhed og en grunderfaring kendetegnet ved en 'ligeoprindelighed' af fornemmelse, tro og forståelse.

“Afhængigt af kirke folder vi vore hænder eller kysser ikoner; tænder lys, indånder røgelse, lader rosenkranse glide mellem fingrene eller bryder ud i sang. Det er imidlertid for at åbne legemet for det guddommelige, at kroppen bliver mobiliseret. Det er netop som noget æstetisk – ikke bare noget sanseligt – at den dannelse, som bønnerne udvirker, foregår i mellemverdenen.”

(Fra kapitlet “Bønnens æstetik”)

Dorthe Jørgensen forbinder æstetik, idéhistorie og religionsfilosofi. Med bøgerne *Skønhedens metamorfose* og *Historien som værk* forsvarede hun i 2006 den filosofiske doktorgrad. *Den skønne tænkning* er hendes teologiske doktorafhandling.

Aarhus Universitetsforlag

ISBN 978-87-7124-364-2



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