

The Beautiful and Language

SASAKI Ken-ichi

0 Modern Aesthetics as a Model of Axiology.

My aim here is to investigate the relation between the beautiful and language and to examine the possibility of the linguistic expression or description of the beautiful. In other words, we will be concerned with the beautiful defined in its ineffable character, in the strong sense of the word. So our main topic is not language but the beautiful, and this setting of the problem to study the beautiful in terms of language will lead us to the crucial point of the essential relation the beautiful has with language.

In fact, ineffability seems a character so striking as to be noticed in every civilisation in the world. Let me speak firstly of the case of traditional poetics of Japan. Under the influence of the linguistics of the Tendai sect of Buddhism, FUJIWARA Shunzei, one of the most outstanding poets and theorists of the poetry of the 11th century, spoke of "the heart of poetry" as follows: "as to this heart, poet has always tried to express it somehow or other; he feels it in his heart without saying it in words, recognises it in his mind without succeeding in pronouncing it in his mouth..."¹⁾

In the western world, this aesthetics of ineffability might be represented by a Goethe. According to him, "art is the intermediary of ineffable things. So it seems stupid to try to mediate such thing still with words. However thanks to this effort, many gains can be made in understanding, and such efforts serve also the faculty of praxis."²⁾ In my opinion, the popularity that not only the literary works but also the aesthetics of Goethe gained among the older generations in Japan is at least partly the result of the affinity it has with our traditional ways of thinking.

Furthermore, it will not be difficult to link this aesthetics to the opposition that contemporary poetics including Russian formalism makes between poetic language and ordinary or scientific language. Here we may go without quoting any particular theory. Then we might be able to suppose a modern western tradition of the aesthetics of ineffability.

Well, I have not cited the case of Goethe at random, because ineffability constitutes the very essence of modern western aesthetics established in the 18th century. To persuade someone of this point, it would probably be enough to refer to the framework of the aesthetics of Baumgarten, who is acknowledged as the founder of modern aesthetics. Baumgarten conceived of aesthetics as "inferior gnoseology." "The *faculty* to know something in obscure and confused manners, i.e. in an indistinct manner, is *inferior*

1) FUJIWARA Shunzei, *Korai futai sho*: Concise treatise on the classical styles in poetry.

2) GOETHE, *Maximes and reflexions; Maximen und Reflexionen*, ed. v. Jutta HECKER, Zähringer-Verlag, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1949, p.56-57 (no.384).

understanding.”³⁾ What he means by “obscure” cognition is not very clear — we might probably think of presentiment, the idea of poet and so on. The distinction however between confused and distinct cognitions is essential, both constituting the category of “clear cognition”. This distinction is based upon the possibility of indicating the notions or properties (*nota*) of the subject matter — if one can point out its constitutive notions, then the cognition is distinct; if not, confused⁴⁾. In other words, confused cognition, including aesthetic cognition, takes its essence from its ineffability.

We understand now that Baumgarten borrowed completely this idea of aesthetics as inferior gnoseology from the framework of Leibniz’s theory of cognition. And we will come back to this later in the main part of this article. But before entering into the discussion, I have to indicate the roots or background of this emphasis that the philosophers of the 18th century put on the ineffable. To begin with my last word, the emphasis comes from the fact that people of the early modern age had to look for the key to value in the ineffable, in something that is directly felt without appealing to a reasoning procedure. What I mean is as follows.

I may cite three key words here: firstly grace, then “non so ché” in Italian, or “le je ne sais quoi” in French, or “I know not what” in English, and in the third place “feeling.” All of these three notions designate the ineffable. In Japanese, we have an idiom “difficult to express exhaustively with pen or tongue”. This expression might remind you of an English phrase “beyond the Reach of Art”.⁵⁾ By this phrase, Alexander Pope meant grace. Grace is really an ineffable quality, that is to say a “je ne sais quoi.” Important is the fact that this grace was considered as an outstanding mark of the worth of a person. Castiglione, author of the *Courtier* which had a great reputation all over the European world in the 16th century, cites first of all grace as the sign of the excellence of a courtier.⁶⁾ That is to say, he does not trust any more the name or rank of someone as the mark of excellence. In the context of the political, economical, and cultural revolution of the Renaissance, he abandons the dead standards of value, prefers to “feel” directly the quality of the persons.

I would like to let Pascal represent this trend in axiology by intuition or feeling (“sentiment”). “We come to know truth”, he says, “not only by reason, but even more by our heart; it is through this second way that we know first principles... For the knowledge of first principles, such as the existence of space, time, movement, number, [is] just as solid as anything produced by reasoning. And reason must trust this instinctive knowledge and base all its argument on it. [The heart is aware instinctively that space has three dimensions, and that numbers are infinite...]”⁷⁾ We must not forget to quote also §278, which says: “It is the heart which is aware of [‘sent’ in the original text of Pascal] God and not reason. That is

3) A.G.BAUMGARTEN, *Metaphysics*, §520.

4) Cf. *ibid.* §510

5) Alexander POPE, *An Essay on Criticism*, 1711, l.155.

6) CASTIGLIONE, *Libro del Corteggiano*, 1518; cf. W.TATARKIEWICZ, *History of Aesthetics*, t.3, pp.122-23.

7) PASCAL, *Pensées*, ed. by L. Brunschwig §282, translation of Martin Turnell, Harper & Brothers, New York, 19, p.161. (The translation is based upon the edition of Lafuma. Because an English translation based upon the Brunschwig edition made by W.F.TROTTER [J.M.Dent & Sons, London & Toronto, 1931, p.79] commits here an error, I prefer that of Turnell).

what faith is : God perceived intuitively by the heart, not by reason.”⁸⁾ We must connect ourselves through the way of “feeling”(sentiment in French) directly to the very principle of value. Otherwise, we should never gain certainty — so says Pascal.

Within this trend of thinking, aesthetics as the science of feeling was proposed. But why can we rely upon the ineffable, whose demonstration is excluded *a priori*? For Pascal it is God who, being felt, gives him in his turn a guarantee of the certainty of the feeling. For us, the problem concerns the beautiful, which was taken by modern philosophers as the paradigmatic case of ineffable value. Why and how can the ineffable be the mark of value?

1. Beautiful and Sensible Qualities.

In the history of the aesthetics of the ineffable, Leibniz played a decisive part, because he systematized the theory of cognition, clearly distinguishing the Cartesian categories of cognition as distinct, confuse, clear, or obscure,⁹⁾ in terms of the degree of the possibility of linguistic expression. I quote from his *Discourse on Metaphysics* §24, to verify his manner of distinguishing between confused and distinct cognitions :

When I can recognize one thing among others but cannot say in what its differences or properties consist, my knowledge is confused. In this way we sometimes know clearly, and without having doubt of any kind, if a poem or a picture is well done or badly, because it has a certain ‘I know not what’ which either satisfies or repels us. But when I can explain the criteria I use, my knowledge is called distinct. Of this kind is the knowledge of an assayer who distinguishes the true gold from the false by means of certain tests and marks which make up the definition of gold.¹⁰⁾

You see that the difference consists in whether we can formulate “the concepts which enters into the definition”¹¹⁾ or not. Here Leibniz opposes the cognition of an artistic quality as representative of the clear and confused to the technical discrimination between real and false gold as representative of the clear and distinct. But elsewhere, in *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas*, he takes for examples of confused cognition sensible qualities such as colour, odor, and taste. So the aesthetic value or the beautiful and the sensible qualities or the secondary qualities if you prefer, are classified by Leibniz under the same category of clear and confused cognition. This thought may give an impression of roughly mixing things of different orders, and indeed, our theme here consists in a sense to differentiate these two orders. But, we must go slowly and acknowledge firstly that the beautiful or aesthetic value and the sensible qualities go together to a certain extent. We can cite two points in favor of this view.

8) *Ibid.*, p.163.

9) Cf. DESCARTES, *Principia philosophiae*, I-45 ; cf. also the proud pretension Leibniz shows at the beginning of his *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas*, in the English edition quoted below, p.289.

10) *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, A Selection Translated and Edited, with Introduction by Leroy E. Loemker, 2nd ed., D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht-Holland, 1969, p.318-19.

11) *Ibid.*

The first point is the attribution of beautiful or sensible qualities to the object, independent of our subjective thoughts. It is this tulip that is red and beautiful at the same time. This common character is most eloquently shown by the metaphorical use of the word “taste” in aesthetics. Indeed, aesthetics was set up as a philosophical discipline through differentiating the beautiful from sensible qualities. That is the case for Kant. Considering the personal variety of satisfaction, Kant points out that “this edifice is beautiful *for me*” is a strange way of speaking, while “this wine is good *for me*” is proper.¹²⁾ He aims there to demonstrate the universality of aesthetic judgement. However, if we compare this aesthetic utterance with a descriptive one of a sensible quality instead of an utterance of satisfaction, the relation will be upset. We might say usually “*I think* this edifice is beautiful”, but we never say “*I think* this tulip is red.” This “*I think*” constitutes the moment of judgement, and a colour does not require a full-blooded judgement in order to be asserted. So the three cases are ranged on the same relative scale, from the more objective to the more subjective in this order : colour — beautiful — satisfaction. Colour and the beautiful share the same character of being attributed to the object.

The second point is the qualitative difference of the beautiful. At the time of Leibniz, as noticed in the quotation above, the beautiful was synonymous with the excellence of an artistic execution. But during the 18th century, people became more and more accustomed to discriminate some kinds of aesthetic excellence besides the beautiful : grace, the sublime, etc. These notions will be grouped, as is very well known, as aesthetic categories in the following century. As part of this tendency, with regard to the beautiful, besides its value moment, its qualitative differences were underlined. Thus, for us now, every masterpiece of art is not described necessarily as being beautiful, and claims our consideration of the specificity of its aesthetic quality. For, when we want to emphasize the value moment of a work of art, we are accustomed to speak of “beautiful in a broader sense of the word.”

This tendency is even more conspicuous with so-called aesthetic concepts. While aesthetic categories are very much limited in number, analytical philosophers enlarged the repertory, adopting the name of aesthetic concepts (or aesthetic qualities)¹³⁾. It is often

12) KANT, *Critique of judgement*, §7.

13) “Aesthetic concepts” belongs to the mind of appreciator or critic, while “aesthetic qualities” constitutes the aesthetic object, so that these two notions are correlative one with another. As to the discussion developed on this topic in contemporary aesthetics, I quote only some basic works: Frank SIBLEY, “Aesthetic Concepts”, *Philosophical Review*, 68(1959); *id.*, “Aesthetic and Nonaesthetic”, *Philosophical Review*, 74(1965); Monroe C. BEARDSLEY, “What is an Aesthetic Quality?”, (1971) in *Aesthetic Point of view*, ed. by M. WREEN and D. CALLEN, Cornell U. P., 1982; M.H. MITIAS(ed.), *Aesthetic Quality and Aesthetic Experience*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1988; Göran HERMERÉN, *The Nature of Aesthetic Qualities*, Lund U. P., 1988. The first article of Sibley established this topic in the analytical aesthetics, and the book of Hermerén is, so far as I know, the most comprehensive study on this subject. In this subject brought into question by Sibley and his argument itself, I hear a faraway echoe of the early modern aesthetics: the character of being “non condition-governed” he finds essential to the aesthetic concepts is, in my opinion, another version of the Leibnizian notion of “clear and confused” cognition (on this notion of Sibley, see the critic of Peter KIVY, *Speaking of Art*, Chap.3 “Are Aesthetic Terms Ungovernable?”, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973). In that sense, I may acknowledge I have the same starting point as Sibley. But the point at issue is quite different. I don’t find in Sibley and other contemporary philosophers mentioned above, any discussion on the general stand point of the modern aesthetics, the axiology of the ineffable, creative use of language and the positive silence before the beautiful. As to the difference

quite difficult to tell if something is an aesthetic concept or a name of simple secondary quality¹⁴). Consider for example these adjectives : stout, delicate, placid, ample, clear, obscure, smooth, rough. They may all be used in the description of works of art and may so qualify as aesthetic concepts. While the first four, taken from the vocabulary of human life or human character, contain a certain moment of value, the last four have almost none so that they become like secondary qualities.

The aesthetic qualities are ambiguous in that they include both a moment of objective quality as well as an axiological moment. This ambiguity is expressed in the semantics of the word 'quality' itself. Raymond Bayer said, "value is ... an adulatory way of speaking of quality."¹⁵ I have the impression that the axiological nuance is even stronger in the English word 'quality', than in the French word 'qualité' considered of by Bayer. Anyway, this ambiguity means, on one hand, that aesthetic qualities are like secondary qualities *to a certain extent*. So the Leibnizian conception is justified to that extent. But that means, on the other hand, that aesthetic qualities are distinguished from the secondary qualities by their value moment.

Now, we must ask what is the meaning of this ineffability of sensible qualities, which Leibniz opposed to the gold inspector's distinct cognition.

2. The Nature of Gold and Colour.

Let us return to Leibniz. At the start, we must take note of two points. Firstly, the beautiful as well as secondary qualities are *by their nature* ineffable. That is to say, if there were a lack of a perfection, that would concern neither a personal one nor a special lack of vocabulary in the language. This point leads us necessarily to our second point. While the clarity of a cognition corresponds in general to a word, the 'confusedness' or 'distinctness' of it presupposes a special analytical device that is to be effectuated in the form of a *definition or utterance*.

Having a word 'beautiful' or 'red,' we say "this tulip is beautiful" or "it is red" : that is a clear cognition. But even if we change the adjective with another one which covers more nuance, the cognition does not become distinct accordingly. Semanticists have gathered many examples of variety in vocabulary. A race like the Eskimo who lead their life in the

between "aesthetic categories" and "aesthetic qualities/concepts", I have two remarks to make. Firstly, a difference of linguistic custom: it seems to me that German and French philosophers prefer the expression "aesthetic categories", while English philosophers are inclined to the "aesthetic qualities or concepts". In this sense, they are synonymous one with another. But the philosophical background of these two notions is completely different. The aesthetics of aesthetic categories, established by German philosophy of 19th. century, is interested in describing the different aesthetic worlds, which constitute in total, a clauded and harmonious universe of the aesthetic; so the numbers of these categories were quite restricted. On the contrary, The contemporary analytical philosophy of aesthetic concepts concentrates its attention on the logical status peculiar to this class of terms; so the list of these terms is opened.

14) Hermerén tries to classify the vast variety of aesthetic terms into five groups, see *op. cit.*, chap.5 "Types and Varieties of Aesthetic Qualities". As to the affinity of the aesthetic qualities with the secondary qualities, *ibid.*, p.97-98.

15) Raymond BAYER, *Traité d'esthétique*, Armand Colin, 1956, p.102.

snow has many words concerning snow, so that they distinguish usually many states of snow we are not accustomed to discriminate. Painters have a similar sensibility for colour : they distinguish and identify a great number of colours which we could not differentiate. Let me cite my own case. Not having English or any other European language as my mother tongue, I do not know exactly what kind of red the word 'vermillion' designates. I am sure that painters distinguish even several kinds of vermillion. However, for them also, each of these distinct kinds of vermillion still remains ineffable. That is the problem. So we must pass from the level of word on to that of definition or utterance.

So, what sort of definition or linguistic explanation is required for a cognition to be qualified as distinct? I think the Leibnizian example of an assayer of gold is suggestive but also misleading. As criteria applied by the assayer, Leibniz thought of weight, colour and aqua fortis.¹⁶⁾ These criteria are probably effective for discriminating false gold from real gold, because they are based on the scientific knowledge at least of that time.

But if it were this kind of scientific analysis that is required for a distinct cognition, isn't it possible to give a similar one even to a colour? For example, according to Newtonian optics, the difference of colours is reduced to the difference of the angle of refraction that a prism gives to a beam passing through. So the proper number of this angle of refraction must be effective for distinguishing red from other colours. The case is exactly the same as the case of assaying of gold. In fact, Leibniz shows elsewhere an "empirical" interest in the determination of colour by the angle of refraction.¹⁷⁾

Then would Leibniz accept this definition of red and acknowledge the possibility of the distinct cognition of colour? No, I do not think so. Because colour is *by its nature* ineffable and its cognition must remain 'clear but confused.' We find a text in his *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas*, where he speaks explicitly of this matter.

Thus we know colors, odors, flavors, and other particular objects of the senses clearly enough and discern them from each other but only by the simple evidence of the senses and not by marks that can be expressed [notis enuntiabilibus]. So we can not *explain* to a blind man what red is, nor can we explain such a quality to others except by bringing them into the presence of the thing and making them see, smell, or taste it, or at least reminding them of some similar perception they have had in the past. Yet it is certain that the concepts of these qualities are composite and can be resolved, for they certainly have their *causes*.¹⁸⁾

We now understand that it is not a matter of simple discrimination or analysis for the sake of identification, just as in the case of gold assayer. As a matter of fact, for the discrimination of sensible qualities, we use very often their "causes." Consider the names of pigments or perfumes. The vermillion of cinnabar is the red pigment made of cinnabar, and the perfume made of the flower of rose is called rose water. Then, why does Leibniz

16) LEIBNIZ, "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas", *op.cit.*, p.292.

17) LEIBNIZ, "Tentamen Anagogicum : An anagogical Essay in the Investigation of Causes," *op. cit.*, p.484.

18) *Ibid.*, p.291, italic by Sasaki.

reject this discrimination by cause? Because it would not make it understood to someone who has not known it directly. So, we must ask once more : why does Leibniz require a definition to make someone who is ignorant of the quality in question understand it? I think it is because the definition would not otherwise articulate the essence of the sensible quality, which is to be felt, and it would not be worth the name of definition.

This last point is very important. If we forget it, it should be difficult to differentiate between the gold assaying case and that of colour. For as far as the formula and efficacy of the definition are concerned, there are hardly any differences between the case of gold and that of red. On the one hand, the definition of red by the angle of refraction is just as precise and as scientific as the definition of the gold by colour, weight, and proof with aqua fortis. And on the other, this definition of the gold, which Leibniz took as sufficient for constituting a distinct cognition, does not allow me to understand what gold is if I do not know in advance the gold. So the different treatment of the two cases is explained, only if we suppose that Leibniz might consider the natures of gold and colour differently.

Well, here, let me ask what the essence of gold is. The question may be mysterious. And the difficulty consists mainly in determining at what level to set the essence. In one sense, we can say Plautus and Molière knew gold better than Leibniz and alchemists like Doctor Faust did. But for Leibniz as philosopher, gold is a substance, and its essence is to be sought for philosophically or scientifically. By contrast, colour is only a property dependent on a substance, something that expresses the relation between this substance and us. Consequently, if we try to treat colour scientifically and make a distinct cognition of it, its vivid reality will disappear like a phantom. That was the *paradigm* or *épistémè* if you prefer, of the time of Leibniz.

Now it becomes clear, I hope, in what sense the sensible qualities are ineffable by their nature. But we have considered nothing of the beautiful in this respect. Probably, the analogy does not go very far, because ineffability is not a mark of value in the case of sensible qualities, unlike the case of the beautiful. We must rather observe the peculiarities of the beautiful over against sensible qualities.

3. Levels of Language and Understanding.

Before and in order to go further, I would first like to recover some important points we have clarified. The confused and distinct levels of cognition correspond respectively to two linguistic levels of word and philosophical statement. In spite of the evident continuity, these two levels are in fact, separated almost by an abyss. The one is situated in the field of common life and the other beyond it. In other words, the former is at the level of ordinary language, the latter at that of technical language. Even if objective and exact, technical language cannot restore what we actually experience. Well then, concerning the sensible qualities and the beautiful, what is experienced has the crucial importance. So they are ineffable by their nature.

This radical distinction between two levels concerns the nature of ordinary language and

our understanding. In the text of Leibniz quoted above, to explain meant to make someone understand. As for sensible qualities, the only way to make someone understand them was to let someone have a direct experience of them or to recall a similar experience. Common experience is the necessary condition for the communication. And this common experience is carried and kept by the vocabulary of ordinary language. In my opinion, ordinary language, memory, and understanding are tightly related to one with another; and it is very important to have a general view of this triadic phenomenon so as to elucidate ineffability, because they constitute the level of “effability” if you permit me this expression.

As Bergson pointed out, there are two kinds of memory¹⁹⁾. Or more precisely, the memory differentiates itself into two kinds, or rather, it disperses between two poles. The one is genuine memory, which keeps the particular images of our personal experiences. The most famous example of this type of memory is Proust’s episode of the little madeleine cake. The other is the memory that has lost the particularity of experiences and is transformed into an intellectual ability : typical is linguistic competence as well as our knowledge in general. It is the second one that interests us for the first place.

Why have many experiences lost their particularity to become our knowledge? This knowledge is anonymous and corresponds just to the level of the vocabulary of ordinary language. I cannot remember the first apple I ate, neither its colour nor its shape, nor its taste etc., but I know the apple with these properties which are grouped under the label of the word ‘apple’. So it might be possible to explain the loss or deterioration in question as a function of the language that constitutes the very substance of memory. We might have exchanged the richness of experience for a simple word, just as we purchase some substantial thing with money. But I think the relation is not one way, but reciprocal. Indeed, language leads and adjusts our mental life to its own framework. But at the same time, every language is a product of each people and so to speak a materialized memory of their common life.

Let us consider a little the process of learning a new word. We know that children at a certain age repeat “what is it?” or “what is the name of this?” And usually they are satisfied with a simple word as answer. To know a name must be a fundamental demand of our mental life. But why just the name? Why can children be satisfied with a word? I think we should consider that when a child asks the name of something, he has already had a potential knowledge of it. In other words, he has been aware of this thing which he has encountered in a certain way and consequently which interests him. So asking the name of this object, he designates not this particular object, but the class of things which he has known. What is important here is that his potential knowledge is based upon the repeated accumulation of the same experiences in memory, so that it is situated from the beginning not at the level of individual things but at the general level, which corresponds exactly to the level of words.

We had better add immediately that the experience is repeated according to the style of the common life of the people. Let us recall the Eskimo’s differentiation of many kinds of

19) BERGSON, *Matière et mémoire*, 1896, Chap.2.

snow. It is their conditions of life that forced them to discriminate these kinds of snow. Naturally, a child does not succeed easily in differentiating them. But as a subtle difference might entail a mortal result, Eskimos eagerly teach their children to discriminate this difference. Therefore, their rich vocabulary of snow is the result of necessity and the interest in life, and language serves to convey the wisdom of the people from generation to generation, and also to maintain the level of the common interest.

Natural language is then from its very beginning oriented to communication. Language originates from and organizes common experiences of the people and so, serves as a mediator of common experience for them. The important thing is that language is, in its ordinary use, a tool for the communication of common experience, and not of a very particular one. So it is easy to recognize why the beautiful is ineffable. But then, why are the sensible qualities which are most commonly experienced also ineffable? So we must enter into the final stage of our investigations.

4. The Beautiful and Creative Uses of the Language.

From the outset, we must make here a crucial discrimination. The beautiful and sensible qualities are ineffable but in absolutely different senses. The beautiful asks and even compels us to describe it, even if the description in us remains tacit. It is a miraculous force that elicits several attempts at description, but always in vain : we know finally that no linguistic description fits the beautiful. So the beautiful appears to us as a charming enigma, that is to say, as a challenge to and proof of the language. Its ineffable character is nothing else than the feeling of this failure. In other words, the ineffability of the beautiful is a positive character experienced as such.

On the contrary, the sensible qualities have no such character. The red of this ink is just red and nothing else. Indeed, being asked to describe it, we should be embarrassed. But who asks for it? It is surely not the red itself, unlike the beautiful. The red is ineffable, because we have nothing to say beyond the dimension of common language. So the ineffability of the sensible qualities has a fictive or even false character. If you have something red that provokes your description, it is not a simple red any more, but a beautiful red.

I hope we understand now why ineffability is the mark of value in the case of the beautiful. It is so because ineffability is the real effect of the beautiful. So ineffability represents at least an essential moment of the beautiful. Therefore we must recognize that the relation between the beautiful and language is not accidental but essential. And as mankind sometimes dares the impossible, we venture to give verbal expression to this ineffable which the beautiful is. In this respect, we have to prolong our research into that dimension of language which transcends the behavioural level and corresponds to the level of the beautiful.

Ordinary uses of language cannot describe the beautiful, and so the beautiful is ineffable. But we can use language in creative ways. And I am convinced that creativity

constitutes the essence of language because we learn language in such a way that we can use it creatively. In other words, through learning language, we acquire at the same time the competence of abstraction and creative thinking. Here is my explanation.

As Saussure insists, language is a system of differences. So it serves to differentiate our experiences. Or rather, we become able to differentiate our experiences in proportion to the learning of language. For example, let us consider the case of “to drink milk”. In the arms of our mother, we had one complex experience of drinking milk. And hearing our mother, we learned little by little to differentiate the thing called ‘milk’ and the behaviour called ‘to drink’. Then we learn that milk is also called ‘drink’ together with juice, water etc., but that bread and vegetables are never called so. So to learn language is to learn to handle the same and the other. In this way, we acquire the ability of abstraction, which consists in paying attention to only one aspect in reality and ignoring others.

The ability of abstraction entails the ability to think of absent things : to think of a particular object like ‘milk’ in terms of a general concept like ‘drink’ requires one to represent even implicitly many absent objects other than milk. And, needless to say, to formulate a phrase is to devise a combination of several terms. In this way, the competence of language is accompanied by two essential components of invention, namely the ability to represent absent objects and that of combination. So we must even admit that the ordinary uses of language require a bit of creativity. But naturally, it is the capacity for rhetorical expression and for poetic expression that is the crystallization of linguistic creativity.

It seems that the beautiful defies above all the poet blessed with an excellent linguistic creativity to describe it. He must recreate the beautiful, because the simple way of representation is not possible any more. And his statement also requires a creative response on the part of the hearer or reader, because concerning an absolutely unique phenomenon, we have no basis for accepting his statement in the form of recognition. It is not a communication in the sense of sharing the intention of speaker, but an interpretation in the sense of reconstruction according to our own manner.

5. The Beautiful and Silence.

The beautiful, in summary, is a force that charms us and arouses in us a desire to share it with someone else. Indeed, the beautiful is based on many qualities or properties in the object. This fact is easy to acknowledge, because the painter for example, manipulates these qualities, size, form, colour etc., to realize the beautiful. The combination of these qualities being describable, we try to describe them in order to communicate the beautiful—in fact, the main part of the work of art critics has consisted, for a long time, in attempting this description. But this effort can never attain the beautiful. The beautiful remains always beyond description and continues to defy all of our efforts at description. Therefore, the beautiful appears as ineffable in the positive sense.

Thus, the beautiful is a comprehensive being, in the sense of what Jaspers called an ‘Umgreiffendes’. That is, the beautiful presupposes and comprehends all objective qualities

and properties but remains always beyond them. So, before this comprehensively beautiful, there can only be two responses on our part. If we are blessed with competence in creative expression, we dare to challenge the defiance of the beautiful. The simple description of the beautiful object is essentially inefficient. So our effort must be of a poetical nature. We do not aim to reproduce the state of this particular beautiful object any more, but to recreate in our own manner the beautiful that we have found in that object. This act must be carried out beyond the dimensions of ordinary communication, for the medium is not necessarily the language ; we might be able to appeal to the styles of music or painting or dancing and so on. Thus we should have a chain of the beautiful, as Plato describes in his *Ion*.

For the second response, we might simply murmur, 'beautiful.' Indeed, this utterance only affirms the beautiful we find before us, and is lacking in the power of 'making it understood' to someone else who is absent. Still, this utterance is like a resonance of the plenitude we experience. In the sense of an extreme poverty of means to communicate representing an extreme richness of emotion, this murmur is like a certain silence. In fact, it is most often silence that is best suited to the beautiful. It is matter of the beautiful imposing silence, like the beautiful that Descartes found in God :

Now, I think the best is to be absorbed in the contemplation of God himself, consider in myself several attributes of God, and to stare at, admire and honour the beauty of his immense light, as far as the eyes of my dizzy intellect could support (Meditation III).²⁰⁾

It is what we experience before the vast beauty of nature or before a great master piece of art such as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Or, maybe, after having found a poetic expression for the beautiful, we should find ourselves in a state like this. Indeed, the beautiful is a value that we must stare at silently, in a honouring delight.

The University of Tokyo

20) DESCARTES, *Œuvres*, ed. by Ch. Adam & P. Tannery, t.VII, p.52.