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RECOGNITION OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND THE EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

In the *Summa theologiae*, in the course of his treatment of goodness in general, Thomas Aquinas asks whether goodness has the aspect of a final cause. In the first objection to this thesis he quotes from *De divinis nominibus*, chapter 4, where Dionysius the Areopagite proclaims that “*Goodness is praised as beauty.*”¹ Since “*beauty has the aspect of a formal cause,*”² logic demands, so it would seem, that the same obtains in the case of goodness: it too embodies the aspect of a formal cause. In his response Thomas concedes that in any subject beauty and goodness are fundamentally identical since they are both grounded in form. It is in this sense that goodness is praised as beauty. Goodness and beauty nevertheless “*differ logically (ratione differunt).*”³ Goodness, on the one hand, regards the appetite (*appetitus*) since it is what “*all things desire (omnia appetunt).*”⁴ Beauty, on the other hand, regards the cognitive faculty for “*beautiful things are those which please when seen (pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent).*”⁵ Umberto Eco maintains that this definition of beautiful things in terms of its effects — “*novel, disconcerting, and unusual in the context of Scholastic language*”⁶ — constitutes “*a bold attempt to counter an excessively objectivist conception of beauty which obscured its true nature.*”⁷ A brief consideration of Thomas’s pithy assertion supports Eco’s contention.

¹ *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4, *obj.* 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1.

⁴ *Ibid.* Thomas thus concludes that goodness does in fact have the aspect of an end, “*the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing*” (*ibid.*).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ UMBERTO ECO, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Central to Thomas's definition of beautiful things as "those which please when seen," is the human subject who sees and consequently experiences pleasure on account of that act of seeing. Condensed in this phrase is Thomas's understanding of the human person as hylomorphically constituted and the implications of this constitution for the life of mind. In this regard it ought to be borne in mind that "Not only does he offer an account of a whole array of aspects of human nature, this account is also supremely integrated and is sensitive to the dynamic interplay between reason, the emotions, and our bodies in a way which is perhaps unequalled in this [sic] history of Western thought."⁸ While on a Thomistic construal the experience of beauty ultimately engages intellect and will, it presupposes the deliverances of the sense faculties — particularly those of sight and hearing — and is informed by the passions/emotions.⁹

This article intends to indicate the significance of the interplay of cognitive and affective interests for our experience of beautiful things. In this regard a consideration of the dynamic interaction between intellect/reason and the passions is bracketed due to limitations of space and time. The point can nevertheless be secured by an examination of Thomas's account of the interinvolvement of intellect and will. Since cognitive and affective interests do not exist in isolation but rather presuppose their proper objects it follows, so it will be argued, that on a Thomistic construal the nature of these objects informs the tenor of the subject's experience of beauty. In particular it will be argued that a necessary — albeit not sufficient — condition for the optimal experience of beauty possible in this life is that the will be firmly set on God as its final end. This article will limit itself to the case of natural beauty in arguing this point.

THE INTERINVOLVEMENT OF INTELLECT AND WILL: ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

While the cognitive and volitional activities of the soul constitute distinct operations, they are nevertheless inseparable in their principle on account of the hylomorphic constitution of the human being. In Thomas's view intellect and

⁸ KEVIN E. O'REILLY, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 16.

⁹ Both "emotion" and "passion" are here intended as translations of the Latin *passio*. It ought to be borne in mind, however, that the term "passion" does not connote the same degree of intensity as it does in contemporary English. For that reason I will henceforth employ "emotion" in translating *passio*. For a brief discussion of the problems in translating *passio* into contemporary languages, see PAUL GONDREAU, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002), 30–33.

will can never be completely independent of the influence of each other.¹⁰ While they do indeed constitute distinct faculties, a relationship of dynamic reciprocity obtains between them. Although Thomas does not compartmentalize these two faculties, thereby rendering each impervious to the influence of the other, neither does he confuse their operations. His construal of the relationship between intellect and will is more nuanced than that of later philosophers such as Kant and Nietzsche, representatives of these two extremes. In various places Thomas posits a relationship of “interinvolvement” between intellect and will. Thus, he writes: “[T]hese two powers, intellect and will, involve one another,”¹¹ where intellect refers both to the speculative and to the practical intellect.¹² This interinvolvement can be depicted in terms of circulation: both intellect and will constitute both the beginning and end of each other’s activities. In other words, the intellect both moves and is moved by the will while the will both moves and is moved by the intellect.

On account of this interplay between intellect and will, the unfolding of love and knowledge cannot be separated from each other. Indeed, their interaction establishes a unified direction to this unfolding as intellect circles and overflows into will and as will circles and overflows into intellect. The interaction of intellect and will means that, on the one hand, true perception cultivates right willing and vice versa. In this way the knowing and willing subject moves towards the attainment of the *bonum verum* and the *verum bonum*. On the other hand, however, erroneous perception distorts the operation of the will while a distorted operation of the will has a negative effect on the intellect’s ability to discern the truth. In this case the dynamic interplay between the operations of intellect and will entails a downward spiraling which leads the knowing and willing subject to espouse a privation of the *bonum verum* and *verum bonum*. In Thomas’s view, human spiritual activity is a synthesis of knowledge

¹⁰ For a lengthier treatment of this point, see KEVIN E. O’REILLY, “Transcending Gadamer: Towards a Participatory Hermeneutics,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 65 (2012), 855–58. The first two paragraphs of this section are based on this account.

¹¹ *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus* 7: “[I]stae duae potentiae, scilicet intellectus et voluntas, se invicem circumeunt.” Latin text accessed at <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html> Translation taken from *Disputed Questions on Virtue: Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus In Communi* and *Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus Cardinalibus*, trans. Ralph McInerny (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999).

¹² *Ibid.*: “But it should be noted that the intellect, both speculative and practical, can be perfected by a habit in two ways. In one way absolutely and as such, insofar as it precedes will as moving it; in another way as it follows will which elicits its act on command, because, as has been seen, these two powers, intellect and will, involve one another” (“Sciendum est autem, quod intellectus tam speculativus quam practicus potest perfici dupliciter aliquo habitu. Uno modo absolute et secundum se, prout praecedit voluntatem, quasi eam movens; alio modo prout sequitur voluntatem, quasi ad imperium actum suum eliciens”).

and love: love involves knowledge and knowledge involves love. If either the intellect or will is defective with regard to their respective operations, then the other will also necessarily be rendered correspondingly defective in its own proper operation.

The foregoing account of the causal interplay between intellect and will in one sense carries the subjectivist tenor of individual experience of beauty further than Eco's account of Thomas allows. While beauty is the truth experienced as good (*pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent*), it is evident that one's perception of truth is influenced either for good or for bad by the tenor of one's willing. At the same time, however, Thomas's account can appeal to metaphysical moorings that secure its objective constitution: the ultimate object of the intellect is God as the First Efficient Cause of all that exists and the ultimate object of the will is God as the Final End of all that exists. Concerning the intellect Thomas writes: "[T]here resides in every man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect which he sees; and thence arises wonder in men. But if the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things, the natural desire would remain void."¹³ With regard to the will he argues that "it is evident that naught can lull man's will save the universal good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone; because every creature has goodness by participation. Wherefore God alone can satisfy the will of man."¹⁴ Objectivity in the experience of beauty is thus secured by appeal to God as First Cause and Final end of all that exists. To be more precise, this appeal furnishes a necessary albeit not sufficient condition for such objectivity. Other factors such as properly functioning sense faculties and rightly attuned emotional responses are of course also required. Nevertheless, man's existential situation in the created ontological space between God as First Efficient Cause and God as Final Cause provides the context in which beauty can be optimally experienced in this life.

It is important to be clear about what is not being claimed. We are not stating that non-believers cannot have any experience of beauty; nor, indeed, are we claiming that all believers have a developed capacity for aesthetic experience. What we mean is that, *all other things being equal*, the quality of this experience will necessarily differ from believer to unbeliever. The intellect and will play a crucial role in the experience of beauty; it is therefore natural that a radical difference in the quality of the life of intellect and will would lead to a radically different experience of beauty. Here, it must be noted, we are not dealing with one factor among others in the constitution of the quality of one's experience of

¹³ *STh* I, q. 12, a. 1.

¹⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 2, a. 8.

beauty. What is in question rather is the ultimate horizon of the life of intellect and will, a philosophical point that is established by Thomas.¹⁵

Just as man's capacity for the apprehension of truth and his pursuit of goodness can be undermined, so too can his capacity for the experience of beauty. Faulty sense faculties and inappropriate emotional responses can be contributory factors in this regard. One's socio-cultural context and/or lack of suitable educational opportunities also inevitably play a crucial role since insertion within a tradition is prerequisite for the kind of 'seeing' which is constitute of aesthetic perception.¹⁶ When the prevailing culture proposes aesthetic artefacts that are lacking in terms of the objective conditions for beauty, habituation is likely to induce a widespread predilection for 'apparent' beauty in the same way as vice give rise to pleasure in what is simply an 'apparent' good. Given that beauty is intimately related to truth and goodness, there is much more at stake here than merely an 'appropriate' response to an artefact that is offered for one's contemplation.

Notwithstanding the manifold and complex factors that can either enhance or undermine one's experience of beautiful things, the logic of Thomas's definition of beautiful things as those which when seen give pleasure, his philosophical psychology, and his theistic and participatory metaphysics dictate that a person whose whole life is ruled by the pursuit of God as his final end or ultimate beatitude will necessarily enjoy a more exalted sense of beauty than if he sought some other end in the same vein. (The claim is certainly not that all who seek God as their final end necessarily enjoy a qualitatively superior experience of beauty than those who do not.)¹⁷ This contention is grounded both in the dynamics of interinvolvement between intellect and will that we have already outlined and in the fact that, according to Thomas's definition, these two faculties are engaged in the experience of beautiful things.

Thus far I have considered only the subjective pole of the aesthetic fact. Experience of beauty however requires that beautiful things be present to the intellect, that they be apprehended or seen according to their objective constitution. The next section therefore turns to a consideration of the celebrated notions

¹⁵ Surely whether a theistic attitude makes some difference to one's experience of beauty is a philosophically interesting point. Clearly, according to the argument of this article, such an attitude has implications for the life both of the intellect and of the will. Since the experience of beauty engages both of these faculties, a theistic attitude necessarily has implications for its tenor. To argue that we lack objective criteria that allow us to measure the overall aesthetic situations of individuals against each other is to miss this philosophical point.

¹⁶ On this point, see O'REILLY, *Aesthetic Perception*, 88–89.

¹⁷ One might express this point thus: All other things being equal all who seek God as their final end necessarily enjoy a qualitatively superior experience of beauty than those who do not. Clearly, however, things are rarely if ever equal in matters aesthetic.

of *proportio*, *integritas*, and *claritas*, the three elements constitutive of beautiful things according to Thomas. The experience of beauty, it emerges, is a function of the interaction between subject and object. With these considerations in place we will be in a position better to appreciate the significance of a theistic attitude for aesthetic experience.

Proportio, integritas, AND claritas

IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY

Proportio denotes the relation of one thing to another — for instance the relation of matter to form or of cause to effect.¹⁸ It can also signify the adequacy of a thing to the demands of its form as well as the harmony between an object and its function. This notion can also be applied to the relationship between the different parts of a single thing or to a conglomeration of things unified among themselves by some relation or other.¹⁹ There are also psychological aspects to this notion in addition to ontological ones. One example of psychological proportion is the compatibility of a sense organ with a given sensible quality²⁰ — sight with colour, for example, or hearing with sound.²¹ In addition to the proportion between sense-faculties and their respective objects there is also the proportion between the intellect and its object.²² Eco argues that in general

¹⁸ See *SCG* III, 54 [13]. For a much more exhaustive discussion of the notion of *proportio*, see Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 71–98. Here it is possible to offer only a few broad strokes in presenting Thomas's construal of *proportio* — as well as *integritas* and *claritas*.

¹⁹ See *SCG* II, 16 [10].

²⁰ See *STh* I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1: “[B]eauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind—because even sense is a sort of reason, just as is every cognitive faculty.”

²¹ See *Sentencia libri De anima* III, lectio 2 [597]: “[H]e [Aristotle] says that since every harmonious and well-balanced sound is, as a sound, identical somehow with the faculty of hearing, the fact that the sound is a kind of harmony implies that hearing is the same. Now harmony or proportion is destroyed by excess; an excessive sense-object is therefore destructive of the faculty. An excessively sharp or heavy sound can destroy hearing; an excessively tasty thing destroys taste; too much brightness or darkness destroys the sight; over-powerful smells destroy the sense of smell. As though the sense itself in each case were a kind of proportion.”

²² The employment of this idea in the context of a theory of beauty seems to me to be a legitimate extension of Thomas's appeal to it in a purely theological context at *STh* I, q. 12, a. 1, ad 4: “Proportion is twofold. In one sense it means a certain relation of one quantity to another, according as double, treble and equal are species of proportion. In another sense every relation of one thing to another is called proportion. And in this sense there can be a proportion of the creature to God, inasmuch as it is related to Him as the effect of its cause, and as potentiality to its act; and in this way the created intellect can be proportioned to know God.”

psychological proportion primarily allows the aesthetic act whereas ontological proportion furnishes the ground of the causes of aesthetic pleasure.²³

In delineating various kinds of proportion the adequacy of a thing to the requirements of its form was mentioned. Thomas refers to this idea also in relation to the notion of *integritas*, which he equates with perfection. This perfection is twofold, he argues. The first type, relevant to our concerns here, requires that a thing possesses everything that constitutes its substance. In other words, perfection pertains to the form of the whole and arises from the integrity of its parts (*ex integritate partium consurgit*).²⁴ In order to be adequate to itself a thing cannot lack anything of what its form demands. Etienne Gilson expresses this idea as follows: "By determining its type, form also determines the conditions required for the integrity of any being."²⁵ Thomas asserts that things that lack integrity are on that account ugly.²⁶ For a thing to be beautiful it therefore requires everything that is demanded by its nature. In other words it must be adequately proportioned to its nature. If it falls short in this regard it thereby undergoes a diminution in respect of its beauty. Integrity therefore qualifies, as Eco proclaims, as "a type of proportion."²⁷ Indeed Thomas himself implies this understanding of integrity when in his commentary on the *Sentences* he posits that "deformity can affect a body in two ways. The first arises from a defect with respect to a limb so that we call mutilated bodies ugly. What they lack is due proportion [of parts] with respect to the whole."²⁸ Eco concludes that our aesthetic experience of a thing is thus "regulated by the concept of the thing; it involves a judgment regarding the degree of conformity between thing and concept."²⁹ This appraisal of Thomas's construal of aesthetic perception, while true insofar as it goes, nevertheless fails to advert to the fact that experience of beauty is constituted by more than simply an apprehension of an object by means of pure concepts, that is to say, concepts devoid of any affective influence. We have

²³ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 95. Edgar de Bruyne's comments support this interpretation: "The mind does not project its own harmony into things and does not create beauty. It does not passively receive the objective harmony of form and does not suffer beauty. It recognizes the pre-established harmony obtaining between the structure of the subject and that of the object and finds itself bathing in a world that is completely musical. That is what brings about aesthetic delight" (EDGAR DE BRUYNE, *Études d'esthétique médiévale*, vol. 3. [Bruges: de Tempel, 1946], 302).

²⁴ *STh* I, q. 73, a. 1.

²⁵ ÉTIENNE GILSON, *The Arts of the Beautiful* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1965), 30.

²⁶ *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8.

²⁷ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 99.

²⁸ *In IV Sent.*, d. 44, q. 3, a. 1, qc. 1. My trans.

²⁹ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 101.

already intimated as much: the intellect, as has been emphasized, is possessed of a volitional gaze.³⁰

The third constitutive element of beauty, namely *claritas*, safeguards against a purely objectivist construal of beauty. As Eco writes, "If order is to be an aesthetic quality, it must have the power of self-expression; it must be knowable and perceivable as order."³¹ We have seen that *proportio* and *integritas* are intimately connected with form. So too is *claritas* since all forms in fact participate in the Divine clarity.³² *Claritas* is therefore intimately related to *proportio* and to *integritas*. Eco argues that what is distinctive about *claritas* is that it constitutes "*the fundamental communicability of form, which is made actual in relation to someone's looking at or seeing the object.*"³³ While Thomas does not offer any texts that provide explicit evidence to support this interpretation, it does nevertheless accord with his philosophy of mind. At the level of sense-knowledge the sense-faculty becomes like or is assimilated to the sense-object by taking on its form in an intentional manner. Thomas expresses this theory succinctly with a phrase borrowed from Aristotle: the sense-faculty which is actualized is the same as the sense object which is actualized (*sensus in actu est sensibile in actu*).³⁴ This theory of intentionality also applies analogously at the level of intellectual knowledge: according to Thomas the actualization of the capacity for thinking is identical to the actualization of an object of thought (*intellectus in actu est intellectum in actu*).³⁵ This is because the intellect is simply the capacity for thought while the object of intellectual thought, that is to say, the universal, has no existence outside of thought. By logical extension one could say that *claritas* is the capacity of form to communicate itself, a capacity that is actualized by someone's 'seeing' the object. One could express this state of affairs with the formula: the actualization of the act of 'seeing' is identical with the actualization of an object's *claritas* (*visio in actu est claritas in actu*).³⁶ This formula brings out Thomas's balanced attitude towards the beautiful, an attitude that in the words of Cyril Barrett "avoids the twofold error of giving beauty an absolute objective

³⁰ For an extended treatment of this point, see O'REILLY, *Aesthetic Perception*, 78–98.

³¹ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 102.

³² See *In De div. nom.*, 4, lectio 5.

³³ Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 119.

³⁴ See *STh* I, q. 87, a. 1, ad 3. To be more precise, Thomas writes: "[S]ensus in actu est sensibile, propter similitudinem sensibilis, quae est forma sensus in actu." The formula, *sensus in actu est sensibile in actu*, is at once a summary and an interpretation of this statement in accord with what Thomas immediately goes on to say about intellectual knowledge: "[I]ntellectus in actu est intellectum in actu, propter similitudinem rei intellectae, quae est forma intellectus in actu" (*ibid.*).

³⁵ *Ibid.* For an account and reasoned defence of Thomas's theory of cognition, see ELEONORE STUMP, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2005), 244–76.

³⁶ This point is taken from O'REILLY, *Aesthetic Perception*, 27–8.

status, on the one hand, and of making it a mere projection or objectification of a subjective experience, on the other.”³⁷

It turns out therefore that a proper understanding of Thomas’s position requires that one accord due importance to the force of subjectivity in the domain of aesthetic experience. At the same time, however, his appeal to God both as the ultimate object of the intellect and as the ultimate object of the will not only provides metaphysical moorings for the unfolding of the life of mind but provides the fundamental criterion for objectivity in matters axiological in this life: this objectivity is a function of the degree to which intellect and will strive after are assimilated to God as the creative cause of all that exists, including the human intellect, and as the final end of all that exists, including the human will.

As the creative cause of all that exists, God is the Divine Artist — albeit He creates *ex nihilo* while human artists must employ pre-existing matter. The next section delineates Thomas’s contention that all things have been ordered hierarchically among themselves by God as well as being ordered teleologically, that is to say, ordered in view of God as their final end. Both kinds of ordering entail reference to the constitutive elements of beauty: *proportio*, *integritas*, and *claritas*. Natural beauty thus has an objective constitution which awaits actualization by the subject’s aesthetic *visio*. However, as the next section demonstrates, important aspects of this objective constitution lie beyond the capacity of an atheistic aesthetic *visio* to actualize. In other words, there are aspects of the objective constitution of natural beauty that are amenable to a theistic *visio* alone.

NATURAL BEAUTY³⁸

Dabney Townsend delineates the problem at issue in relation to certain contemporary attitudes towards natural beauty. On the one hand, he writes, “it [natural beauty] is the source of much pleasure.”³⁹ This assertion indicates in terms compatible with Thomas’s definition of beautiful things that we are in the domain of the experience of beauty: something of creation’s *proportio*, *integritas*, and *claritas* is seen, thereby giving rise to pleasure.⁴⁰ Thus the point to be argued here is not counterfactual: my contention is not that the absence of a theistic

³⁷ CYRIL BARRETT, “The Aesthetics of St. Thomas Re-examined,” *Philosophical Studies* 12 (1963), 110.

³⁸ The reason for focusing on natural beauty rather than on artistic beauty is that the former relates directly to God as its creative cause, while the latter is (in its proximate causality) the fruit of human endeavour. To focus on the former appeals more clearly to the concern of this article, namely the difference that a theistic attitude makes to one’s experience of beauty.

³⁹ DABNEY TOWNSEND, *An Introduction to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 180.

⁴⁰ See *STh* I, q. 39, a. 8: “For beauty includes three conditions, *integrity* or *perfection* (*integritas sive perfectio*), since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; due *proportion* or

attitude entails an inability to experience natural beauty. The capacity to appreciate natural beauty is part and parcel of the human condition, although it can be undermined by physical or psychological factors. My point rather concerns what this experience of beauty includes — or rather, in the absence of a theistic attitude, excludes.

What the absence of a theistic attitude excludes with regard to the experience of the beauty of nature emerges in an inchoate way in Townsend's subsequent comments. Nature "is there for its own sake."⁴¹ It does not express anything and it "lacks an artist."⁴² Invocation of God as the Divine Artist is merely an attempt to "assimilate our perception to a model of aesthetic communicability."⁴³ The universe, therefore, while it may or may not exhibit a certain order, is not ordered to any end beyond itself: "[I]t is there for its own sake."⁴⁴ This assertion as well as the correlative statement that nature "lacks an artist"⁴⁵ is question begging. Certainly Townsend does not address the issue of proofs for the existence of God in the Western intellectual tradition. It is not possible to enter into a detailed discussion of Thomas's proofs within the confines of this article.⁴⁶ It must be pointed out however that the impetus behind them is precisely the realization that nothing can provide the explanation for its own existence, that is to say, nothing can be there simply for its own sake. This logic, derived from our everyday experience of things around us, is applied to the universe as a whole: its existence stands in need of explanation. Thomas's philosophical proofs are intended to provide such an explanation.⁴⁷

harmony (*debita proportio sive consonantia*); and lastly, *brightness* or *clarity* (*claritas*), whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color."

⁴¹ TOWNSEND, *An Introduction to Aesthetics*, 180.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For a positive critical appraisal of all Five Ways see EDWARD FESER, *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010), 62–120. For other critical engagements with Thomas's proofs, see C.J.F. MARTIN, *Thomas Aquinas: God and Explanations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); ANTHONY KENNY, *The Five Ways* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); and *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens, C.Ss.R.*, ed. John R. Catan (New York: State University of New York Press, 1980), 52–131.

⁴⁷ One pivotal strand in Thomas's argumentation in the proofs concerns the impossibility of an infinite regress in the chain of cause and effect. The ultimate cause of the universe, namely God, must however necessarily exist outside the ordered series of cause and effect that we encounter within it. As such His Being must be construed analogically: since He is the transcendent first effective cause of all things His Being infinitely transcends His effects and so certain things that we say of creatures must be ascribed to Him analogically, that is to say, according to a mode of linguistic usage that furnishes "a mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation" (*STh* I, q. 13, a. 5). This analogical construal of being necessarily implies a metaphysics of participation:

The theological notion of creation leads logically to the notion of God as the Divine artist.⁴⁸ As Thomas writes in the *Summa contra gentiles*: “All created things ... stand in relation to God as products of art to the artist.”⁴⁹ Since art is a function of the practical intellect/reason,⁵⁰ God can be said to have made all things “by the ordering of His intellect.”⁵¹ The diversity in creation is explained by the fact that an intellect that understands many things cannot be adequately represented by the production of only one thing. Since the Divine knowledge is infinite, “it represents itself more perfectly if it produces many creatures of all grades than if it had produced only one.”⁵²

Diversity in nature also finds an explanation in God’s perfection,⁵³ for one would naturally expect the highest degree of perfection in a work made by the supremely good workman. In this regard Thomas appeals to the notion of the priority of the community over the individual, a notion not so evident to a modern mindset. According to Thomas “the good order among diverse things is better than any of the members of an order, taken by itself.”⁵⁴ The reason for this state of affairs, explains Thomas, is that “the good of order is formal in respect to each member of it, as the perfection of the whole in relation to its parts.”⁵⁵ Here Thomas subordinates *proportio* to *integritas*: the perfection of the parts depends on the good order of the whole. To state the point negatively: if the good order of the whole is undermined so too is the perfection of the parts since they are ordered to the constitution of the whole. Fittingness demands that creation, the work of the Divine artist, should not lack the good of order since one expects the supremely good workman to produce a work marked by the highest degree of perfection. As Thomas has established, however, the Divine intellect is represented most perfectly by many creatures belonging to all grades of being and so it follows that the good order of creation requires the

although God infinitely transcends His created effects, these effects nevertheless still participate in His Being, albeit in a mode proportioned to their finite mode of being. See *STh* I, q. 4, a. 3. For a more extended discussion of this point see RUDI TE VELDE, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 95–102.

⁴⁸ While the proofs are also compatible with the notion of the eternity of the world they demonstrate that the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of creation, while it transcends reason, is nonetheless in harmony with it.

⁴⁹ *SCG* II, 24 [5]. For a treatment of creation as emanation and as a work of art, see te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, 102–108.

⁵⁰ See *STh* I-II, q. 57, a. 4: “[A]rt is the *right reason of things to be made*” (*[A]rs est recta ratio factibilium*).

⁵¹ *SCG* II, 24 [5].

⁵² *SCG* II, 45 [7]. See also *SCG* III, 97 [2]: See also *STh* I, q. 47, a. 1.

⁵³ On God’s perfection, see *STh* I, q. 4; and *SCG* I, 28.

⁵⁴ *SCG* II, 45 [8].

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

diversity and inequality of created things.⁵⁶ Thus is *integritas* subordinated to the *proportio* among the community of created beings. As Alice Ramos puts it, “The beauty of the universe is ... more than that of individuals; it is their community; their being adapted, suited, to one another, helped by one another, and harmoniously arranged.”⁵⁷ This diversity and inequality is attested both by the hierarchy of being and between the species of the beings that constitute a genus.⁵⁸

In addition to this ordering of things among themselves Thomas also notes the ordering of things “towards an end and especially their last end,”⁵⁹ namely the Divine goodness. This good order is once again created by God as “the cause of things by His intellect”⁶⁰ in which “the type of the order of things towards their end” (*ratio ordinis rerum in finem*)⁶¹ preexists. This *ratio* of things ordered towards their end is what we mean by providence, which providence does not operate simply in a general way but exercises its influence with regard to all things in their particularity.⁶² The causality of God’s goodness “extends to all being, not only as to constituent principles of species, but also as to the individualizing principles; not only of things incorruptible, but also of things corruptible.”⁶³ Final causality reaches down even to matter inasmuch as form furnishes its end since matter is in potency to form.⁶⁴

As already noted, all things are ordered to God as to their final end. They must consequently be ordered among themselves. Even ‘chance’ events issuing from some lower cause that do not seem to exhibit any order are in fact found to be ordered when referred to a higher common cause.⁶⁵ Thomas employs the example of flowers blooming side by side in a field to illustrate this point, concerning which Oliva Blanchette comments: “The beauty of a whole field in bloom is not a mere accident in the universe; it is part of its order and goodness.”⁶⁶ Certainly,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ALICE RAMOS, *Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 78.

⁵⁸ See *SCG* III, 97 [3].

⁵⁹ *STh* I, q. 22, a. 1.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² See *STh* I, q. 22, a. 2.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See *SCG* III, 20 [5]: “[S]ince matter, considered in itself, is potential being and form is its act, and since composite substance is actually existent through form, the form will be good in itself; while the composite substance is so in so far as it actually possesses form; and the matter is good inasmuch as it is in potentiality to form.”

⁶⁵ See *In VI Metaph.*, lectio 3 [1205].

⁶⁶ OLIVA BLANCHETTE, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 183.

for Thomas, this ordering of things towards an end and especially to God as the final end, possesses an aesthetic import: just as all things that are effected by art are subject to the ordering force of that art, so too all things come under the ordering force of Divine providence. Indeed, in his commentary on the *Divine Names*, he refers to this ordering in terms of harmony (*consonantia*): “God is the cause of harmony, *as calling all things to Himself*, inasmuch as He turns all things to Himself as to their end.”⁶⁷ In this regard he also notes that the word for ‘beauty’ in Greek (*kalos*) is derived from the verb ‘to call’.⁶⁸ According to this view of things the idea that nature is simply there for its own sake is untenable.

Thus is nature’s ordering to God as its final cause intrinsic to its beauty as also is the hierarchical ordering that is a fruit of the Divine creative causality. Failure to appreciate these two kinds of ordering necessarily constitutes a significant intellectual privation, which privation necessarily serves to diminish the quality of the aesthetic *visio*. Within the intellectual space afforded by a theistic attitude, however, one must allow for gradations within the experience of natural beauty. The following concluding comments seek to explicate this claim.

A THEISTIC ATTITUDE AND THE AESTHETIC *visio*

The dynamic interinvolvement between intellect and will leads one to concur with Reinhard Hütter’s description of the will in the case of external action but also in the case of “what one might call the mind’s activity of judging.”⁶⁹ Hütter explains that the “will” in this case can well be described as “reasoning’s directness — that which constitutes the horizon of the gaze in which judgments are made.”⁷⁰ This gaze is thus not simply conceptual but is also volitional. While the intellect moves the will according to its particular judgments, the will also exercises a constant influence on the intellect “by directing it in the light of the good to which the will is drawn.”⁷¹ In brief, concludes Hütter, the expression “rectitude of mind” denotes “*an intellect directed by the will that is drawn to the ultimate good.*”⁷²

This point has profound implications for how one construes the nature of the aesthetic *visio*, encapsulated in the formula, *pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent*. Understood properly the intellectual component of the aesthetic *visio*

⁶⁷ *De div. nom.*, 4, lect. 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ REINHARD HÜTTER, “The Directedness of Reasoning and the Metaphysics of Creation” in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (NY and London: T&T Clark, 2005), 171.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

is shaped by the extent to which the will seeks God as its proper and final end. In this regard there are varying degrees of realization of union with the Divine goodness. It is a fact of human experience, moreover, that all too many people substitute one or other finite goods for God, goods that are intrinsically incapable of delivering true happiness.⁷³ Horizons of the gaze within which intellectual judgments are made therefore vary considerably and so too, consequently, do the judgments of different individuals.⁷⁴

When we apply these considerations to the experience of beauty it becomes clear that those things that are seen (*quae visa*) are conditioned by the extent to which the will strives for God as its ultimate good, for the *quae visa* are the function of a volitional gaze. In this article I have argue that an intellectual gaze that is theistic in tenor is capable of perceiving aspects of natural beauty that escape the gaze of an atheist. On account of the dynamic interaction between intellect and will that has been emphasized in the course of this article, one can posit that a greater rectitude of mind occasions greater intellectual clarity (*claritas*): it comes to see the ordering of nature more and more in the brightness of the Divine *claritas* according as it participates to an ever greater degree therein.

RECOGNITION OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND THE EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

S U M M A R Y

Central to understanding St. Thomas's definition of beautiful things as those which, when seen, give pleasure (*pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent*) is a grasp of the dynamic interaction between intellect, on the one hand, and affectivity (the will and the emotions), on the other hand. This article focuses on the nature of the interaction between intellect and will, since this consideration

⁷³ It ought to be emphasized however that earthly goods are genuine goods, deriving their goodness from their participation in God's uncreated goodness. Thus Thomas tells us at *De malo*, q. 5, a. 1, ad 5: "As a created good is a likeness and sharing of uncreated good, so the attainment of a created good is a happiness analogous to true happiness."

⁷⁴ For a more detailed exposition of this point, see KEVIN E. O'REILLY, OP, "The Significance of Worship in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas: Some Reflections," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 53 (2013), 456–57.

is sufficient to secure its argument, namely that a necessary — albeit not sufficient — condition for the optimal experience of beauty possible in this life is that the will be duly fixed on God as its final end. This point is established with reference to natural beauty in particular since this kind of beauty relates directly to God as its creative cause.

KEYWORDS: God, Thomas, beauty, intellect, will

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Bóg, św. Tomasz z Akwinu, piękno, intelekt, wola