Reaffirming the Importance of Beauty

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By

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INTRODUCTION

This book considers how philosophy has taken and continues to take seriously the relation of beauty to the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious, each considered as a significant way of being. As its richest, philosophy has always been defined by its interplay with aesthetic/beauty. I explore how beauty is instantiated in the relation of philosophy and ethics, aesthetic, and religion. Running throughout this work will be the following threefold sense of philosophy. I will take seriously the challenge to philosophy of the sense of beauty as revealed by the aesthetic, the religious and the ethical.

In general, contemporary philosophy has played a significant part in dealing with the question of beauty and its relation to the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, each considered to play an ultimate role in the status beauty has in philosophy, and the importance of beauty in a way that is affirmative to different traditions.

Roger Scruton in *Beauty* and William Desmond in *The Gift of Beauty and the Passion of Being,* both contribute intelligently and in a very original way to the main philosophical issues concerning Beauty and contemporary Art.

Roger Scruton's work caught the imagination of a great many thinkers and writers, and as a result left an indelible mark on twentieth-century British philosophical, theoretical, political, and literary writing. An appealing idea about philosophy's contemporary task turns on the question of philosophy's relation to beauty. Scruton makes an explicit statement about beauty and shows that certain themes that contemporary thought has sometimes believed itself to initiate are in fact already present and alive in the ancient traditions, and he employs the ancient sources-primarily Platonic, even go back to Plotinus, and which became incorporated by various routes into Christian theological thinking. According to this idea beauty is an ultimate value-something that we pursue for its own sake, and for the pursuit of which no further reason need be given. According to Scruton, we don't have to agree with such judgments, the status of beauty as an ultimate value is questionable, in the way that the status of truth and goodness are

not. Scruton proposes to consider the concept of beauty without making any theological claims.[1]

Like many of his contemporary counterparts, Scruton offers an alternative to the persistent depreciation of beauty, which is important precisely because it is understood to take place within a horizon of irredeemable way of life.

Not only Roger Scruton, but also William Desmond one of the leading voices in contemporary philosophy in the continentalist tradition, and developing a singularly contemporary style in metaphysics, he too has written significant books emphasizing the importance of beauty. To succeed in this concern I will develop a dialogue between these two important contemporary thinkers—namely; why the notion of beauty remains so important to philosophy and reaffirming it. The principal sources for my argument are the works of these two philosophers.

Desmond's thinking is not only metaphysical as a thinking of transcendence, his way of thinking the transcendent in the human is by way of Plato's eros, which is at once particular and universal. Eros is "lack of".

But this energy which is eros is itself polymorphic, as burning desire for the truth, for the other, for the ultimate, for God, and supremely idiotic, for it is no "relation" or "property" of an already formed "self", but an openness or relation in which first and in which alone, anything like a human self is possible.

By idiocy, Desmond intends what is implied by the Greek sense; the idiotic (*idiotēs*) deals with what is private, intimate, and not publicly political. In *Philosophy and Its Others*, Desmond emphasises that this is the intimacy of being, which has aesthetic, religious, and ethical manifestations. What he means by the intimacy of being is not "privacy" in the sense of a delimited subjective zone standing in opposition to a "public" zone. Such a zone is one of narcissistic subjectivity—the emotive complement to the instrumental self of objectified publicity. Such "privacy" can be totally devoid of intimacy.[2] It is in the sense that there is a certain excess of being characteristic of what it means to be a self, which can never be completely objectified in an entirely determinate way. For Desmond, God is the ultimate other for whom eros exists, the supreme

[1] Roger Scruton, *Beauty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 19-20.
[2] William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 361.

good which eros yearns for, the good in whose goodness all participate by existing.

A similar point could be made about Heidegger. Heidegger is important to Desmond (and yet he is very critical also—see *Art, Origins, Otherness*), for the ontological turn he makes in phenomenology, and for his powerful reading of the Western philosophical tradition.

In stark contrast to Hegel's hierarchical stratification of the discourses of art, religion and philosophy, Desmond thinks that the languages of art and religion have equal claim to meaning, meaningfulness and truth. For Desmond, it is Nietzsche who essentially sets the agenda for contemporary philosophy. Particularly in *Ethics and the Between*, Nietzsche is not just one voice among others (the voice of the equivocal). He has named the loss of confidence in foundations, and exposed the *libido dominandi* at the heart of philosophy. Not only he, but the situation he describes ("the death of God" as the destruction of all value) must be overcome. Heidegger is one example among many of an inability to overcome the Nietzschean legacy.[3]

This book will situate the so-called end of philosophy, the "death" of art, and "the death of God," in relation to beauty. These "deaths" are related to the *Enzauberung des Welt* that some think is the destiny of modernity. Art must be reluctant to acquiesce in this supposed fate which, if welcomed, would signal its own slow suicide.

"Beautiful"—together with "graceful" and "pretty," or "sublime," "marvellous," "superb," and similar expressions—is an adjective that we often employ to indicate something that we like. Umberto Eco was right to point out that in this sense, it seems that what is beautiful is the same as what is good, and in fact in various historical periods there was a close link between the Beautiful and the Good. A good is that which stimulates our desire. So if we reflect upon the detached attitude that allows us to define as beautiful some good that does not arouse our desire, we realize that we talk of Beauty when we enjoy something for what it is, irrespective of whether we possess it or not.[4]

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[3] Cyril O'Regan, 'Repetition: Desmond's New Science,' in *Between System and Poetics: William Desmond and Philosophy after Dialectic,* ed., Thomas A.F. Kelly (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. 86-7.
[4] Umberto Eco, *History of Beauty* (New York: Rizzoli Press, 2004), p. 9.

Plato applies to the highest point of this philosophic ascent, the very same word he uses for its lowest. In that way, he reminds us that beauty cannot be sundered from understanding or desire.[5]

According to Hesiod, at the wedding of Cadmus and Harmony in Thebes, the Muses sang some verses in honor of the bride and groom, a refrain that was immediately picked up by the gods attending the ceremony: "Only that which is beautiful is loved, that which is not beautiful is not loved." These proverbial verses, which recur frequently in the work of later poets (including Theognis and Euripides) are to a certain extent an expression of a commonly held opinion regarding the sense of Beauty in ancient Greece. In fact, Beauty had no autonomous stature in ancient Greece: we might also say that, at least until the age of Pericles, the Greeks lacked a real aesthetics and a theory of Beauty.

Eco makes an interesting point when he states that it is no accident that we almost always find Beauty associated with other qualities. For example, in answer to a question on the criterion for appraising Beauty, the Delphic Oracle replied, "The most beautiful is the most just." Even in the golden age of Greek art, Beauty was always associated with other values, like "moderation," "harmony," and "symmetry."[6]

Alexander Nahamas in his book *Only a Promise of Happiness* states that beauty induces us to look for the aesthetic features of things, which, since they are the features things share only with their indistinguishable doubles, constitute their most distinctive and individual aspects. To understand the beauty of something we need to capture it in its particularity, which calls for knowing how it differs from other things, and that, in turn, is to be able to see, as exactly as possible, what these things are and how each one of them, too, differs from the rest of the world. To love something and to want to come to know and understand it can't possibly be separated from each other, and that desire, far from closing us off from the world, leads us directly into it.[7]

A. E. Denham is right to point out that this evaluative mix can seem an uneasy one to Plato's contemporary readers. After all, European aesthetic theory and philosophy of art have for almost three centuries (I would say

[5] Alexander Nahamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 7.
[6] Umberto Eco, *History of Beauty* (New York: Rizzoli Press, 2004), p. 37.
[7] Alexander Nahamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 120.

since ancient times) identified beauty as the principal, if not the paramount, value of created art. In this tradition, beautiful form distinguishes mere invention from artistic creation, and the beauty of a work of art, above all else, explains the pleasure it affords. Indeed, this pleasure has often been considered the ultimate *telos* of artistic practices. Even today, despite the fact that many artists have turned their backs on traditional ambitions to beauty, it remains not only a primary term of artistic evaluation but a vital term of artistic praise. Although beauty no longer counts as either a necessary or a sufficient condition of artistic merit, it continues to be regarded as an important one for many artists, critics and spectators.[8]

In this book, I will suggest that beauty is rationally founded. It challenges us to find meaning in its object, to make critical comparisons, and to examine our own lives and emotions in the light of what we find. To determine its purpose and scope this book will be examining its connotation in contemporary Western culture. After introducing the various meaning of beauty in their historical context, this book puts together different concerns: the philosophical, the ethical, and the religious. It deals with the importance of beauty not only in art and aesthetics, but also in our post-religious time. It examines different issues in philosophical engagements mainly with the works of Roger Scruton and William Desmond, at the same time endorsing and addressing many important themes on art and beauty by Plato, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

I will show that Beauty not only is related to art or the aesthetic, but beauty plays an important role also in religion, this last has not been developed properly. My aim is to show that the notion of Beauty is not only a matter of art and aesthetic, but rather the judgement of beauty orders the emotions and desires of those who make it.

The first chapter concerns the importance of beauty, in its relation to philosophy. It takes seriously also the role of poetry and painting to explore the theme of beauty that runs through this research: how beauty challenges us to find meaning in its object, to make critical comparisons, and to examine our own lives and emotions in the light of what we find. I will address the perplexity about the "identity" of philosophy and claim that beauty and philosophy must instantiate a certain connection. I put emphasis on different issues: such as creation, erotic nature of philosophy, here I take very seriously the view of two great philosophers Plato and

[8] A. E. Denham, ed., *Plato on Art and Beauty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2012), p. xiv.

Schopenhauer, these two like none else could grasp the notion of eros underneath and beyond.

Consider Plato's words (*Republic*, 403c6-7): *teleutain ta mousika eis ta tou kalou erōtika*; the telos of the musical is the erotics of the beautiful. Erotics is telos-bound to beauty. What naming can we give to this now? Certainly it implies that the statement "This is beautiful" is a judgement of value, where to say X is beautiful is to appreciate the presence of a realized value, a perfection. One can only account for the latter in terms of creation as a generosity of being.

For Plato, the hostility to man of divine *phtonos* must be overcome: "God is not envious…" (*Timaeus*, 29e), a refrain repeated throughout the tradition, down to Hegel**.** But *muthos* also forces a question on logos in this respect: Is the image of the wrath of God one name for a radical otherness that thought may break on, even though it must also try to think it? Nietzsche will oppose Plato by opposing tragedy and logos here, but Desmond will say thought must be willing to break on its other, though in thinking it, it may also sing it.[9]

A good example is Plato's *Timaeus*: The Demiurge makes the cosmos to be the best possible, the most beautiful, but also most worthy: it is the good of the "to be" that is affirmed and sung in the aesthetic act of making. The aesthetics of world-making is also inseparable from an analogy of the good, in that the sensuous cosmos is the material incarnation of the affirmed good of the "to be." The Demiurge sings: this is good to be, and beautiful. The cosmos arouses something of the appreciation, perhaps reverence, we experience before great work of art, whose greatness humbles and exalts us at the same time. The aesthetic act as ontological is a religious praise. And so the cosmos, the *Timaeus* tells us, in an aesthetic god. Irreducible to philosophy, religion, or aesthetics here we see beauty in all its forms and spiritual meaning.

Also in *Laws*, 653dff.; 828ff: the Athenian Stranger says (828b) there should be 365 feast days in the year! Desmond in *Philosophy and Its* Others makes an interesting remark, namely that festal being is also related to art in so far as creation involves a generosity of being. Festal being is the origin of *theōria*, hence philosophy. Since the *theōroi* were originally

[9] William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 331, 339.

religious delegates sent by the polis to the sacred games, they were festal human beings. Philosophical mindfulness as thought singing is other is concerned with good time, time as good. Plato mentions sacred fear in the *Laws*: one is reminded of the proximity of beauty and terror of the sacred.[10]

In this chapter the quarrel of poetry and philosophy is analyzed. Even when Plato gruffly attacked the poets, (say how quarrel of philosophy is connected to imagination) he did so because he perceived their power. Despite the ambiguity of images, it is all but impossible to be extricated from their sway; our being and the image seem to be ineluctably twined together. Thus, metaphor is, as it were, the body of imagination. Plato's *Republic* can be seen as an extended meditation on, hermeneutic of the power of the image: as musical, gymnastic, ethical, religious, political, metaphysical. Hence the paradox should not confound as that in a work ostensibly rejecting images, the most memorable passages are the philosophical images: for example, the image of the divided line, the simile of the cave, the image of the sun, the personified image of the nihilistic wolfman Thrasymachus, the image of the fevered city, the image of the ring of Gyges, to name only a few.

Vico, for whom metaphor is first speech, gives a fine list of such bodily thoughts.[11] It is as if in first speech there were an imaginative identification of our aesthetic being, namely, our body, with the body of the world, which would be aesthetic being-there of otherness.

In discussing the Anaximander fragment, Heidegger says that all thinking is poetizing. Also Iris Murdoch's view on why Plato banished the poets from his *Republic* is taken seriously.

The second chapter will focus on the relation of the aesthetic and ethics. The term "aesthetic" is used in its widest traditional sense, that is, as relating to sensuous appearance (*to aisthētikon*), the aesthetic asks for our recovery of the *poiēsis* of intermediate being. This cannot be confined to its artistic expressions, even granting these as frequently its most exemplary articulations. As with other sensitive animals, our consciousness is first bodily, what the Greeks called the "*aisthētikos".* There is the ancient view that beauty is the object of a *sensory* rather than an intellectual delight, and

[10] Ibid., p. 371.
[11] Vico, *New Science of Giambattista Vico,* trans. by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

that the senses must always be involved in appreciating it. When the philosophy of art became conscious of itself at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it called itself "aesthetics," after the Greek *aisthēsis*, sensation. We are pointed to an origin of meaning as coming to articulation in sensuous being, in that this is more than mere neutral matter, in that we desire to transfigure any valueless thereness of bodily being, in that we cannot renege on the exigency to beautify being. Against art's idolization as in *l'art pourl'art*, against such cultural compartmentalizing, the aesthetic is not an insulated whole but an opening to the otherness of the whole.

Baumgarten was the first to use the term "*Aesthetica*" to refer to a distinctive sensitive cognition, but also in Kant's "transcendental aesthetic" in relation to the role of the senses in all cognition.

The aestheticist concept of art also stemming from Kant meaning art understood as an entirely special domain, separate from other modes of mind. The wider sense of the aesthetic is implied when Heidegger cites Hölderlin, "*Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnet/der Mensch auf dieser Erde*." Strangely, as it may be perhaps, Plato would agree with Hölderlin (he was deeply influenced by Platonic thought, of course), with the proviso that we ought to be suspicious of the poetic image: its very power makes it extremely dangerous for the psyche, religiously, and ethically speaking. Why else does Plato dwell on the poets *ta mousika*?[12]

I look at the emergence of beauty, its specialization in a work of art, the resistance of aesthetic to conceptualizing and its own tolerance of others. Meditations on works of art by Manet, Van Gogh, Delacroix, Rembrandt, and other artists together with the voice of poets shows us that beauty cannot be reduced to aesthetics only.

In this chapter Hegel and Kant play a significant role.

Other philosophers acknowledged the necessity of images and not grudgingly. Imagination is seen to be indispensible power. For Vico, languages were originally poetic, as were the first human beings. If thinkers like Vico are correct, however, to suppress imagination would be to stifle the primary source of all culture, whether scientific or humanistic. All knowing and hence every advance in civilization originates in the

[12] William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 325.

image. All original thinking, including scientific thinking, is first imaginative.

There are many philosophers who take very seriously the importance and the power of imagination. Not only Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* has been a provocative book on imagination as ontological. Even the existentialist view of Sartre developed from his early works on imagination: *The Psychology of Imagination* and *Imagination*. Collingwood develops a theory of imagination in *The Principles of Art*, and also Roger Scruton's *Art and Imagination* emphasises the indispensable/necessary role of imagination in trying to give a systematic account of aesthetic experience.

This view of imagination as transcendental was developed aesthetically by the Romantics, who were also influenced by Kant's rendition of genius in the *Critique of Judgment*. Genius becomes the heroic exemplar of imaginative power. Romantic thought conferred great importance on the psychology of the genius. Though modernism and postmodernism are in reaction to this, the popular mind still identifies the artist with a clichéd version of genius. Some version of art as "creation" has dominated aesthetics since Kant. Romanticism (concretizing Kant's productive imagination in general culture) helped destroy the taboo on ascribing divine qualities to human beings. We are creators, it is claimed, even capable of rivalling God.

But to imply that we are beyond imagination is senseless, if imagination is transcendental. The very rejection of imagination is itself parasitical on the power of imagination rejected and so the negation is self-negating. The importance of transcendental imagination is undeniable; what is controversial is our philosophical interpretation of it—there are epistemological, ontological, aesthetic, ethical, and religious aspects to this. Imagination tries to name the elusive original power of articulating being in the self, and the realization of its importance is one of the great achievements of modern philosophy.[13]

Things portrayed in art are not portrayed as useful. They are portrayed as interesting for their own sake. Poetry and painting work in the same way.

Romanticism moving away from beauty, it was a movement towards the sublime presenting great tragedies rather than sweet fairy tales—the fair of

[13] Ibid., p. 329.

sweetness that beauty can bring into our lives. Art as a deception in this sweetness consolation—maybe there is no consolation. Art should have another role showing the truth to people. Art was seen as a form of lying, of faking things.

I take seriously Jean-Louis Chrétin view in his book *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, where he tries to constitute a dialogue with works of art and what they look upon, and that each work of art (visual or verbal) considered, is a manual act of presence (painting) formed in response to the appeal seen and heard by the artist in the acts of presence made by human bodies.

But the truth is that great art is rare and offers spare consolation to the standardized perceptions of our egalitarian age. Great art evidences a different economy of mind, one that restores and enlarges imagination beyond utilitarian parsimony. It joys in sheer seeing, seeing for the sake of seeing, seeing freed from ulterior motivations.

According to Scruton, great art calls for silence, for slowness; it must be taken in intervals. It insists on quality of attention, that we dwell with the rich thing itself. It claims concentration as its right. It asks especially for patience in perception. Art needs distance, respect, aloofness, in order to be allowed to speak to us out of the quiet spaces of its otherness.

That the call of beauty appeals to the entire body, so that the eye listens to the ear sees the presence of beauty. Scruton gives the example of Van Gogh's painting. Also Desmond refers to Van Gogh he will also anticipate and refer to art as an aesthetic naming that importantly points us to this originary richness of experience. If we look at an artwork as "object," like a Van Gogh painting, the thing we behold is never emotionally neutral. The yellows are not neutrally there; the blues are genuinely somber, the golden sunlight is God's gaiety. There so-called "emotional values" belong to the thing before us.[14]

The third chapter will pay attention to the importance of art and religion. I discuss art as embodied in being religious and the overdetermined ambiguity of the interplay there is between art and religion. There are many issues to situate in this chapter, the so-called end of philosophy, the "death" of art, the "death of God," the weakness of the ethical. I will take seriously human freedom to this extend.

[14] Ibid., p. 67.

These results are not to be endorsed but they must be understood. The "end of philosophy" has been an issue since Hegel, those who think the recent debate is not worth analysing, it means not to deal with difficult position contemporary philosophy finds itself. Thus, Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche are thinkers on philosophy's end, the first in contrast with religion, the second in relation to political revolution, the third in relation to tragic art.

The Enlightenment (17th century-19th century) brought with it a certainty of the religious anchor in everyday life. So art suddenly become prominent as a human enterprise, and with it the birth of the subject. There are three important figures in this movement; Earl of Shaftsbury, Baumgarten, and Kant. These great thinkers raise the question: What do we learn from art? Is what we learn from art a kind of truth—a truth that we, perhaps, couldn't learn from any other activity? What is the moral value of art?

Scruton draws our attention that there is also a certain kind of habit that arose, especially in the late 19th century, connected with people like Oscar Wilde of putting aesthetic values first, saying that these are the things that matter. Wilde famously said, "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing."[15] Wilde proved old-fashioned moral values which got in the way of that. For Scruton to put aesthetic values first is, or might be, a kind of immoralism.

But in his works of art, Wilde didn't think that. Oscar Wilde's dictum: "All art is quite useless." And in the following I am drawing from Desmond's thought; the dandy and utilitarian are not unlike; for both art is beyond utility but in one case it is an amusement for relaxation, in the other an entertainment for escape. Art's uselessness is rather a kind of metaphysical appreciation of the thereness of things just in inexhaustibility of their being there and in the intimacy of their otherness. This we value for itself, letting it be with delight, surprised by joy in its otherness.[16]

We live in a world that the utilitarian values are the only values that there are, which means that things cannot have a value that it is a form of use/instrumental purpose. Desmond remarks on how Dostsoevski hated the utilitarian utopia of the harmonious ant-heap, gives a clear picture of

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[15] Oscar Wilde, *Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* (L. Smithers: London, 1899), 3.1.19.

[16] William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 103.

utilitarian value. Dostoevski's underground man might seem the complete opposite of Kant's man of pure reason, but if we understand the equivocity of being, we will understand how the dreams of reason give rise to such monsters. The underground man is perversely equivocal, because man is not a mathematical equation. This very perversity of being of the human being is the sign of an ontological complexity beyond univocity that cannot be approached or deciphered without express acknowledgment of the ontological power of free indeterminacy, its transcendence of determinate univocity.[17] Dostoevski's *Underground Man* had the perverse measure of Enlightenment, rationalist, humanistic, utilitarian ethics: man will not do what is best for him, and you can argue his rational self-interest till you are blue in the face and still his desire may be perverse and twisted.[18]

It is not always easy to bring together Scruton and Desmond as I try to make sense of the role religion/God plays in relation to aesthetic and philosophy. Desmond is a religious thinker, whereas Scruton as he approached the end of his life, wrote about religion. It is not always consistent, nor was it always orthodox. For Scruton, as for Kant, we are not objects in a world of objects, but rather subjects with a unique point of view on the world. Looking out at the world we can see the transcendence that shines through it and which permeates it. Hence the central theme is aesthetics. Instead of thinking about God in rational terms, as if this were the primary or central way of relating to God, for Scruton we meet God in transcendent beauty. This comes in the form of beautiful church buildings, divine choral music or religious paintings and rituals. It is through the repetitive actions of long established rituals that lift us out of mundane and elevate us to a sphere which seems to be outside of time. In the end, faith depends on the rituals that sustain it.[19]

Scruton in his lecture, "The True, the Good and the Beautiful", makes an interesting remark when he stated that we think of our end from a religious point of view: we try to find it in different ways, but there are also people who do not look for it. It is difficult to explain to people how to justify the end of existence and not just the means. We need the real presence of the

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[17] William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p.120.
[18] William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 348.
[19] Karl Gustel Wärnberg, "Thinking with Roger Scruton," in *Catholic Herald,* March 30, 2022.

meaning of things. The experience of human form, the human form is all important to us, is the thing that means most to us, they come to us as the life of the spirit, but we can desecrate it with pornography, for it turns the subject into an object, and turned into an object, the subject is losing essentially one's spiritual value. What is behind it is a growing obsession with power, power is the great commodity, making the human body repulsive, and it means that life is meaningless.

We live in a time where there is much ugliness and desecration by the work of art which are supposed to celebrate, we have this period in the history where ugliness has become a kind of cult, not ugliness as such, but more transgressive ugliness (like the figure of the Chapman brothers). For Scruton, transgression has a certain appeal especially to younger people. Transgression more in a sense of "I do not care", an assumption of a freedom to offend, to show the value of other people live for, do not count for you. The consolation of ugliness: a life without mattering, the charm of disenchantment, and the sacred way of desecration. We asked too much of art: to be the light from, and the window onto, the transcendental. If art disappoints we start becoming angry with it. Disappointment becomes repudiation.

Scruton argues that there is need for redemption. Life without ideals tires of itself. The search for beauty is the search for home; for the place where you are at home with yourself. Being at home with yourself means seeing yourself as an other and being at home with what you find. This search does not start with high art; nor does it end there. High art challenges us in the deepest part of our being, and we won't live up to it. It ends in everyday life. People take revenge on beauty because they do not see that there is something more important without which can be no revenge. People misconceive aesthetics when they see it merely as the realm of beauty.

CHAPTER ONE

BEAUTY AND PHILOSOPHY

I. Creation as Beauty

An Introduction to Different Traditons on Creation

There is something magic and enchanting about creation. Many traditions (the Greeks, Christianity, Modernity...) tried to make sense of it. This chapter will give an account of the different approaches by the traditions, emphasizing more on the concept of beauty, and why is it important and how does it relate to creation?

First there is the ancient Greek notion of creation, Plato's ancient Greek notion of creation asserts the sense of beauty in creation. How is beauty related to this process, and why is it that we define cosmos/creation as beautiful. The classic instance, is to be found in Plato's *Timaeus.* The origination of a *cosmos* is not *coming to be,* but *a coming to form.* It is making rather than radical originating. This is the demiurgic view: the maker imposes from chaos or matter, but chaos or matter already are, as well as forms of intelligibility, and necessity; there are woven by the maker into the unity of a cosmic work. The work has come to form a cosmos, a thing of beauty, as well as an ordered whole, because the maker has imposed form on matter. Even if there is some bending of necessity here, there is no radical contingency of the happening of being. The process of origination is one of fabrication or art, in the sense of *technē:* the imposition of the form on perhaps recalcitrant matter, that is worked up into a more beautiful intelligible presence.

Second, there is the legacy of post-Newtonian Christian natural theology; and on the other hand, there is the explanation of the phenomena of life in terms of the operation of the law of natural selection. According to John Milbank: even as sophisticated an academic as John Dupré gets this whole area hopelessly wrong, simple because he has no knowledge of the history of theology and the real nature of its interaction with science. Hence he assumes that "the argument from design" is the strongest traditional

argument for the existence of God, whereas in the most authentic Christian theological tradition (Augustine, Maximus, Aquinas, Cusanus, Pascal) it simply did not figure at all.[20]

In the case of the legacy of post-Newtonian Christian natural theology, one has to do with "creation" only in a bastardized sense. Newton no longer conceived of God as being as such, and the source of finite being produced from nothing but sharing by various degrees in his infinte, simple *esse*. His God was rather a supremely powerful entity who had shaped, alongside himself, other entities with whom he communicated through a shared dimension dubbed his "sensorium," manifest to us as an inferred absolute space and absolute time. According to the, as it were, old covenant of the laws of motion, celestial as well as terrestrial bodies travelled in infinte straight lines unless otherwise interrupted, a movement that is perfectly reversible. But according to the, as it were, new covenant of gravity, celestial bodies were regularly bent back from this course to move cyclically in relation to each other. In the case of both "covenants" one has, on the one hand, an absolutely regularly operating and universal law. On the other hand, one has also the direct presence of God, however precisely conceived, whether in the one case as the absoluteness of space and time, or in the other case as the attractive and repelling force of gravitation. In the latter case, Newton the hermeticist was always in self-conflict with Newton the voluntarist theologian: the latter would have liked to reduce gravitation to mechanism, the former toyed with the notion that God had introduced into reality certain inscrutable and quasi-vital "active principles".[21]

In the third case, one has the Darwinian tradition itself. It is, of course, not at all the case that Darwin displaced the ancient monotheistic doctrine of creation with the thesis of evolution by natural selection. To suppose that it is would be to remain within the terms of the bastardized theological assumptions of Paley and the divine design tradition. Yet, within the terms of this tradition, it is possible also to argue that Darwin was in one respect modifying received theology rather than simply standing it on its head. His

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[20] See John Milbank, '*Glissando:* Life, Gift and the Between' in *Between System and Poetic: William Desmond and Philosophy After Dialectic*, ed., Thomas A. F. Kelly (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 217. See John Dupré, 'Human Origins and the Decline of Theism', in *Darwin's Legacy*: *What Evolution Means Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[21] See Simon Oliver, 'Motion according to Aquinas and Newton', in *Modern Theology* 17 no.2 (2001), pp. 163-99.

project shares an important feature in common with the Christian apologetic *The Bridgewater Treatises* (particularly the section by William Whewell) which he indeed cites positively in *The Origin of Species.*

For both works, the Paleyite perspective on life is insufficient in terms of its Newtonian analogue. For in the latter case, while absolute space and time and the force of gravity represent the direct divine presence, this is still manifest in a totally regular fashion expressible by comprehensive laws. There appeared to be no biological equivalent to this regular divine governance, so both treatises are interested in compensating for this lack in terms of discovering more regular immanent processes at work in features exhibiting apparent organic design. This included processes leading to the constant creation of new species, such that *both* treatises exhibit a break with the Aristotelian focus upon fixity of species and the search for explanation of variation within species only, in favour of the attempt to account genetically for the variation of species itself. The difference is that, in the case of *The Brigdewater Treatises*, divine design ultimately explains the mutual adaptation of species and environment; while in the case of *The Origin of Species* the immanent law of one-way selective adaption of species to environment becomes a sufficient *explanans* unto itself.[22]

Nevertheless Darwin, if no doubt for largely expedient reasons, still left open the possibility that he had discovered a "law of creation". More decisively, the phrases in which he does so at the end of the *Origin* manifestly echo the design tradition in terms of its conviction that the pain and struggle of natural selection is justified by the benificial "good" of later outcomes.[23]

Desmond would say that the notion of creation is inseparable from the origination of order, but the order *comes to be*, arises from originating sources that allow forms of beauty to be that are more than our determination or self-determination. Creation is more than an impostion on flux, for something original, something marvelously original, comes to be, comes to shine. Things come to shine; there is a shine on things. But what

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[22] See John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion*: *Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.192-226: Anthony Baker, 'Theology and the Crisis in Darwinism', in *Modern Theology*, 18 (April 2002), pp.183-215.

[23] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, J.W. Burrow ed., (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 458-60.

shines on things when we come to appreciate their given beauty? If there is a *given* order of creation, this cannot be the last word. We must ask: Who or what gives this order? Are we giving the orders, or are we given order, perhaps even under order? The gift of beauty can offer some illumination here. More, it can offer opportunities for reflection that need not be "merely" aesthetic. The gift of beauty relative to the order of creation has some bearing in crucial metaphysical, and indeed theological matters.[24] The foregrounding of the aesthetic in postmodern thinking often co-exists with recessing of the religious, indeed metaphysical and theological, dimensions on the issue.[25]

Cosmos, Demiurge and Creation

The Demiurge as the best (*aristos*) makes the beautiful (*kallistos*) cosmos possible (*Timaeus*, 29a). The Demiurge looks to geometrical paradigms, but geometry seems subsumed into aesthetic and religious finesse for the beauty and goodness of the wrought cosmos. The cosmos is likened to "an *aesthetic god* that is an icon of the noetic" (*Timaeus*, 92c). "It is everyway necessary that the cosmos be an icon of something" (*Timaeus*, 29b). Geometry and finesse are twinned in the divine art.[26]

There is more, of course, with the Demiurge. He is guided not only by the geometry of the ideas, but by the vision of the good, and by the love of the beautiful: the work of art to be wrought is the world as cosmos: a work of beauty, whose aesthetic harmony signs of the intelligible order of the ideas, but which brings forth energies that are not geometrical, but communicate love of the good. The Demiurge makes the cosmos to be the best possible, the most beautiful, but also most worthy: it is the good of the "to be" that is affirmed and sung in the aesthetic act of making. The aesthetics of world-making is also inseparable from an analogy of the good, in that the sensuous cosmos is the material incarnation of the

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[24] See notably Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics I: Seeing the Form,* trans. by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis; eds., Joseph Fessio S.J.and John Riches. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982). Of course, some postmodern currents do try to recover some sense of the sacredness of nature and the given order of creation, in particular those philosophies and theologies that have an ecological and holistic orientation.

[25] William Desmond, *The Gift of Beauty and the Passion of Being: On the Threshold between the Aesthetic and the Religious* (Wipf & Stock, 2018), pp. 101-2.

[26] Ibid., p. 110.

affirmed good of the "to be." The Demiurge sings: this is good to be, and beautiful.

The cosmos arouses something of the appreciation, perhaps reverence, we experience before great work of art, whose greatness humbles and exalts us at the same time. The aesthetic act as ontological is a religious praise. And so the cosmos, the *Timaeus* tells us, in an aesthetic god. And is there not also the crucial claim that the divine persuades necessity? There is something higher than necessity: the love of the good as the properly fitting, what accords with the good. Is it not love of the finite as finite? Why otherwise the desire to make the cosmos the most worthy and beautiful possible?

God is not jealous: this is the famous refrain of the *Timaeus,* here spoken with reference to the divine Demiurge, and echoed down the centuries by thinkers as diverse as Aquinas and Hegel. Not to be jealous: this is a mark of a true original. Jealousy, being envious, is a name for grudging withholding of communication, communication of the good of being. God is not thus grudging. When we think of the divine, the image of the great feast comes to mind (*Phaedrus,* 247; 256b). That mania as enthusiasm happens means that the showing is given, the manifestness happens—even if it happens to be able also that we as recipients, as its hearers or readers, as hermene, do not undertand completely what has been shown or communicated.

Recall Plato's philosophical art and the eikonic nature of the cosmos: "It is everyway necessary that the cosmos be an eikon of something" ("*pasa ananke tonde ton cosmon eikona tinos einai*," *Timaeus*, 29b1-2). Plato gives us a kind of aesthetic theodicy, but we are not "beyond good and evil" in Nietzsche's sense. The cosmos itself is called a sensible god, an aesthetic god that images the intelligible (*eikon tou noētou theos aisthētos, Timaeus,* 92c). But none of this could be without the beyond of the Good.[27]

Contra Nietzsche's view of Plato as depreciating the world of the aesthetic, the cosmos itself is an aesthetic god, a sensible divinity that images the intelligible (*eikon tou noētou theos aisthētos, Timaeus,* 92c): the most beautiful possible. Deeply interwoven here are metaphysics, aesthetics, religion, and ethics (in an ontological sense pointing to the

[27] William Desmond, *Art, Origins, Otherness: Between Philosophy and Art* (Albany: State University of New of New York Press, 2003), p. 187.

goodness or worthiness of what has come to form). Nietzsche says that only as a work of art is the world justified, and he sets himself against Plato. But Plato offers a kind of aesthetic metaphysics in the myth of the Demiurge; and, indeed, an affirmation of the ontological good and beauty of this cosmos, not any nihilistic depreciation.

The idea of God as creator suggests, by contrast, a more recalcitrant notion of origination.[28] One has only to think of the *aesthetic cosmogony* of the *Timaeus,* where the Demiurge, while forming matter according to geometrical forms, is most concerned to make the world the best and most beautiful possible. The coming to form of the cosmos is an *aesthetic act* that affirms the *ontological good* of what comes to be. Not the horror of being, but the worthiness of being to be affirmed - this is what, one might almost say, is *sung*.[29]

As is agreed by many, the premoderns dwelled in the world with some sense of it as a cosmos. This is explicitly inseparable from the aesthetics of being, as the word "cosmos" (cosmetics) indicated—a well-wrought, harmoniously ordered whole—a thing of beauty. Recall the demiurgic art of Plato's god—he works the world as a work of art. One might say this is a matter of *technē*, but it is not a neutral imposition of form and matter. The fitness of the whole is in view.

Heidegger on Creation and Origin

According to Desmond, Heidegger is not entirely wrong to see the sense of the origin as "production" present in the Western tradition, but he seems not to do justice here to this most essential point which is beyond geometry and *technē,* and having everything to do with the giving of the being there of the cosmos as good, and the religious praise and reverence for the worthy beauty of the gift wrought. Demiurgic making does not stress the imposition of form on matter, the kneading of a primal chaos into an intelligible cosmos. That granted, there is still the exceeding of these by shine of the Good, for this shine is not a making, or a form, or a chaos, or intelligible. It is the dimension of the hyperbolic. It exceeds them all, even if it is what makes all of them worthy to be. And is not this power

[28] Ibid., p. 5.
[29] Ibid., p.29.

even hyperbolic to what is shown as hyperbolic through mimesis, eros, and mania?[30]

Heidegger grants that the difference of production and creation, of the craftsman and the divine creator is acknowldged in the world of Biblical faith, but immediately goes on to claim its successful overtaking by a metaphysics of form and matter that is decisive historically, and not least for the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, and hence for the encroachment and assault on things (*GA,* 5: 15; *OWA,* 660-61).

When Heidegger reduces the sense of origin to production throughout *the entirety* of the Western tradition, he is not completely wrong with respect to the Demiurge in one regard, namely the imposition of form and matter. Even here, the other dimensions of what is involved, beyond geometry and *technē,* and having everything to do with the being there of the good, and the religious praise and reverence for the worthy beauty of the gift wrought, on these he is simply silent, and by that silence falsifies what the fuller point is concerning the original demiurgic working of the world as a whole. But he is totally wrong to *insinuate* creation is just production, as imposing form on matter, in notions like *creatio ex nihilo.* One cannot but think he knew better. If he did not know better, this is a glaring ignorance of something essential. And whatever or not he knew better, the say-so of his totalizing claim about the *entire* tradition of philosophy brings out in us strong demurral. Desmond in *Art, Origins, Otherness,* continues to criticize Heidegger's approach; either Heidegger is ignorant, or willful. If ignorant, it is an inadmissible ignorance. If willful, it hardly concurs with the truth of what is at issue with regard to creation. Given his own theological studies, and some knowledge of Medieval thought, it cannot be simple ignorance. If it is willful, perhaps it is less deliberately bloodly minded as driven to its distortions by the need to omit the extraordinary challenge that the notion of creation presents, to philosophy in general, and Heidegger's thought in particular. It leads to a complete obfuscation of the deepest issue, a forgetfulness of creation (on Heidegger's part) not less fateful than the alleged forgetfulness of being.[31]

In fact, the hyperbolic origin enters the horizon of human thought through the hyperbolic notion of *creatio ex nihilo*. This comes from Jerusalem, and not Athens, and Heidegger will say that philosophy is Greek and nothing but Greek, but there is finally a "say-so" about this too, a say-so justifying

[30] Ibid., pp. 49-51.
[31] Ibid., p. 248.

its evasion by the lessons of history. The same history shows us different lessons to the one Heidegger wants to teach, namely, that once this idea begins to dawn on thinkers, thinking itself could not just (arbitrarily) close itself off from this astonishing and perplexing thought. For Desmond, as a son of Parmenides, Heidegger is not different to Nietzsche, and also not to Hegel on this score, that is, in terms of his banishment from philosophy of the God beyond the whole, the God of original creation.

This banishment is hard to distinguish from diktat or "say-so." True philosophizing is open to even the seemingly strangest possibilities of thought, and this here is no exception. What would one feel about a philosopher who said: I only think about these things that "Greek" philosophers thought about, especially early Greek thinkers, and that's that![32]

Yet does Heidegger not make significant reference to creation and nothing? "Poetic projection comes from Nothing in this respect, that it never takes its gifts from the ordinary and traditional. But it never comes from Nothing in that what is projected by it is only the withheld vocation of the historical being of man himself" (*GA,* 5: 64; *OWA*, 698; in the German the word is *Dasein*). He exploits the resonance of *Ur-sprung* in terms of an unmediated leap. Every origination and new beginning entails a leap, and not least art. ("Art lets truth originate.... To originate something by a leap...a founding leap-this is what the word origin means...."; "The origin of the work of art...is art...art is by nature an origin: a distinctive way in which truth comes into being, that is, becomes historical" (*GA,* 5: 65-66; *OWA,* 699)).

Look even at the "sovereignty" of the divine demiurgy in the *Timaeus.* There is some conformity to Heidegger's claim: the Demiurge looks to the Ideas as paradigms to shape the chaos of matter into a cosmos; and indeed there is a geometry of the divine here which is inscribed in the material world itself. This might seem to anticipate the modern mathēsis of nature, and the image of God as the absolute geometer we find in Kepler and Galileo. Yet despite what looks like overlap, it is extremely important to note that the eikonic making of the world is not motivated by *geometry*: the Demiurge is motivated to create out of desire to make the world the *most beautiful and good possible*. Desmond puts this in Pascal's terms, this is a matter of *finesse* and not geometry. In Plato's demiurgic making

[32] Ibid., pp. 249-50.

geometry serves finesse. And finesse concerns the discernment of what is most good and beautiful, and the ultimate "yes" to these.[33]

Moreover, demiurgic making comes out of a communicative being that forms for the other, because the forming power is not jealous, or envious. In the *Timaeus* the discriptions we find of the cosmos made are not those of a univocal geometrical figure, but those bearing on *a beautiful work of art*: this is what a *cosmos* is. It is the *aesthetics of being,* rather than the geometrics, that are more ultimately motivating, more moving. The geometrics of being serve the aesthetics-aesthetics here understood with all the metaphysical and religious and ethical weight the "aesthetic" carried in the ancient ethos, not the evacuated "aestheticism" of post-Kantian culture. We cannot disjoin being and the good, as happens in the ethos of modernity: the aesthetics of being call us to appreciate the worthiness of being there, a worthiness to which we can return a celebrating and consenting "yes." Interestingly, this weight of the aesthetic is just what is in question in Heidegger's own claim to overcome "aesthetics."[34]

It is interesting to recall that Hegel had a sense of the sublime that touches on this issue. It is especially bound up for him with the majestic transcendence of the Jewish God, a God who for him is also connected with the doctrine of creation. While he calls Greek religion, the "religion of beauty," he calls Judaism the "religion of sublimity."[35] But it is the transcendent otherness of the sublime that is for Hegel both its greatness and defiency. For Hegel, Jewish transcendence is superseded by Christian immanence, and hence the sublime God must give way to a divinity more self-determining in immanence, an immanent God also more modernly compatible with humanity's own immanent self-determination. The old order of creation and its sublimity are surpassed in spirit's cultural self-determination. Creation is the self-creation of God, and there ensues the relegation in spiritual ultimacy of the sublime. The spiritual domestication of its aesthetic happening qua the happening of the sublime of its religious significance. Hegel's dialectical-speculative evacuation of the divine

[33] Ibid., p. 220.
[34] Ibid., p. 220.
[35] G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*: *One Volume Edition*, *The Lectures of 1827*, ed., Peter G. Hudgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 328-74.

transcendence yields, Desmond would argue, a counterfeit double of God, and this applies from a Christian point of view, as well as a Jewish.[36]

Nature loves to hide. But ask now not only the hiding is but the *love* and the why of the love of the hiding? Think here in terms of *natura naturans* (nature naturing) and *natura naturata* (nature natured). Nature naturing is manifest in and yet concealed by nature natured; yet we could say nothing of nature naturing without what nature natured communicates. And so we must seek to understand the latter, though the danger is that we forget that it is the communication of nature naturing. The artist is closer to the equivocal process of emergence with nature naturing, but also finds his way, or is given a way, to intimacy with this naturing, by mindful heed to what nature natures.

The Difference between Origin and Creation in Greek and Christian Tradition

All of the terms through which we think about art, at least the original terms, are of Greek provenance: they were formed independently of any idea of creation, for the ancient Greeks, not imagining even the possibility that the world has been created out of nothing, could not in any way compare the activity of the artist to that of God calling things into being solely through his speech. As for the Bible, it does not describe the divine creation through an artistic analogy. Nevertheless, if to create is proper to God, and is distinguished from all human production that transforms matter, it sometimes happens that the Bible compares God to a craftsman, as in the case of the book of Isaiah: "Shall the potter be regarded as the clay; that the thing made should stay of its maker, 'He did not make me,' and a pot says to its potter, 'He has no understanding'?"[37]

But the aim of such comparison is not to illuminate the nature of divine operations, nor to study any sort of divine art: they simply underscore the radical dependence of the creature upon the creator. That God in the *Letter to Hebrews* is named the craftsman of the city hoped by Abraham displays the special holiness of Jerusalem; the text does not specify what the creative act is.[38] Thus production was thought of without creation, and

[36] William Desmond, *The Gift of Beauty and the Passion of Being* (Wipf & Stock, 2018), pp. 106-7. See also Desmond, *Hegel's God, passim.*
[37] Isa. 29:16, cf. Jer. 18:6. Cf. Curtius, *European Literature,* Ex. 21.
[38] Heb. 11:10. The Latin gives *artifex.*

creation, unless it is an analogy of power and of mastery, was thought of without production, for it acts through speech alone.[39]

The weight of this becomes more serious if we take account of the fact that, in Greek philosophy, the study of *technē* and of *poièsis,* of art and production, understood each in the broadest sense, hardly constitutes a secondary regional problem. Heidegger said it powerfully: "Not only did Greeks, Plato and Aristotle, carry out the interpretation of this phenomenon of production, but the basic concepts of philosophy have grown out of and within this interpretation."[40]

Greek thinking about art is characterized by two features: art is a *know how,* and it is the *making of a work*. A knowledge of making is first of all a knowledge, as such, essentially communicable and teachable: that which cannot be learned, or which cannot be learned except through the servile imitation of an individual, is not art.[41] In keeping with this understanding, art is not identified with the artist, but superior to him. If art is a knowledge that I put to work, it always surpasses me: it cannot go wrong, but I can, by departing from its rules or by applying them incorrectly.

That art is the making of a work means that everything in it must be considered in the clarity of the work. Art as human operation fades away within this clarity, which orients art from its origin. All is ordered to this clarity, and art is not concerned with anything that does not concern the work itself. The intentions of the artist are not important, nor are his interior perfections or imperfections. It is in a Greek manner that Saint Thomas Aquinas, who could never be suspected of immoralism or of estheticism, brushes aside as inpertinent any consideration of art that turns aside from the making of a work and the work done.

Aquinas states, "For the craftsman as such is commendable, not for the intention with which he does a work, but for the quality of the work."[42] For, he adds later, "it is not in the artist that one finds the good of an art,

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[39] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art,* trans. by S.E., Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press. 2003), pp. 95-6.
[40] Heidegger, *Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta,* 1-3, trans. by Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995), p.117.
[41] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Alpha, 1.
[42] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas,* trans. by the English Dominicans, ed. Anton C. Pegis (Indianapolis, Ind. and Cambridge, Mass.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), Ia IIae, q. 57, a. 3; II: 433. On the questions, cf. Maritain, *Art est scolastique,* 26.