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## Beauty as a transcendental in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger

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**Publication Details**

Jang, J. (2015). Beauty as a transcendental in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger [Master of Philosophy (School of Philosophy and Theology)]. The University of Notre Dame Australia. <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/112>

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NOTRE DAME**  
A U S T R A L I A

School of Philosophy and Theology  
Sydney

**Beauty as a Transcendental in the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger**

Submitted by

John Jang

A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Philosophy

Supervised by

Dr. Renée Köhler-Ryan

July 2015

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2015

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## Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the method and content of Joseph Ratzinger's aesthetics from a philosophical perspective. Ratzinger takes up Plato's description of man's encounter with beauty as a wounding by the power of *eros*, and argues that the involvement of emotion in this experience does not render it irrational, but rather, stresses that the feeling of beauty is in accordance with *logos*, since the domain of *logos* reaches far beyond abstract processes of reasoning. Moreover, Ratzinger rejects the notion that beauty is simply a cover over what is fundamentally ugly. According to Ratzinger, beauty is the foundation of reality because it is convertible with *logos*, which after all, is not simply unchanging being, but also person, that is, Jesus of Nazareth, who ultimately reveals beauty as truth and love in the form of both *eros* and *agape*.

### **Declaration of Authorship**

This thesis is my own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr Renée Köhler Ryan, for her advice, patience and support. This thesis would not have been possible without her guidance and encouragement.

I would also like to thank the staff and seminarians at the Seminary of the Good Shepherd, Sydney, for their support and valuable fellowship.

## Introduction

The consideration of beauty in Western culture has been moving away from the context of transcendental metaphysics since the time of Descartes.<sup>1</sup> Today, beauty may be thought of as an emotional response to meaningless sensory stimuli, which is an aesthetic attitude much indebted to David Hume, while others may relegate beauty to the subjective realm as described by Immanuel Kant.<sup>2</sup> After Kant, we come across various aesthetic theories associated with an understanding of beauty as an immanent concept subservient to the human will. For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche takes up Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimistic thoughts on the power of the will and transforms it to claim that the chaotic frenzy of the Dionysian element is the ultimate aesthetic principle. Finally, following the atrocious massacres of the Twentieth Century, Theodor Adorno proposes that ugliness is the ultimate reality of which beauty is a privation.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Ratzinger reflects on these philosophical arguments and considers whether they are valid.<sup>4</sup> He does not dismiss them out of hand, but asks the same questions addressed by the various philosophers: is beauty really a metaphysical reality? Is

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Pontynen, *For the Love of Beauty: Art, History, and the Moral Foundations of Aesthetic Judgment* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 303.

<sup>2</sup> Nick Zangwill, "Aesthetic Realism 1," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78; Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 119, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, "The Transfigurations of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus," in *Nietzsche, Philosophy and the Arts*, ed. Salim Kemal, Ivan Gaskell, and Daniel W. Conway (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 58-61; Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Fleeting Promise of Art Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 94.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty," Message to the Communion and Liberation (CL) meeting at Rimini (24-30 August), (2002), [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20020824\\_rattinger-cl-rimini\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020824_rattinger-cl-rimini_en.html).



it not simply emotional and hence irrational and subjective? Is it not a means of deception and a show of power? Finally, like Adorno, Ratzinger ponders upon the suffering of humanity, and asks whether it is not ugliness that is the ultimate foundation of existence.<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, I will argue that Ratzinger is able to respond to these questions in favour of a new understanding of beauty by his openness to three sources of knowledge: (1) philosophy, engaging with both modern philosophical aesthetics as well as classical metaphysics, (2) theology, with particular emphasis on the thought of Augustine, and (3) personal experience, reflected in his recounts of profound encounters with beauty in art and worship.

For Ratzinger, beauty is united with truth and goodness and these together constitute the metaphysical transcendentals. He explains, however, that there is something missing in the Ancient Greek metaphysical understanding of beauty, which is made utterly obvious by Adorno's existential critique that after the Holocaust there can be no real beauty. Ratzinger reveals that a response to this can only come from a project founded on a close relationship between philosophy and theology, which then allows one to see that beauty is not only experienced in the Platonic sense of transcendental participation, but most splendidly made known in the icon of the crucified Jesus, whose paradoxical beauty embraces pain and ugliness.<sup>6</sup> The understanding of beauty as a transcendental in the classical metaphysical sense is therefore surpassed by a beauty that has a face and a name. Beauty, then, is a way for us to encounter this person, and yet this person is both *logos* and love. The equivalence between person and being in beauty ultimately has a profound impact on how we understand our own being as persons.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., §5.

<sup>6</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §19.

<sup>7</sup> *Credo for Today: What Christians Believe*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 126.

## Structure

The first chapter considers the problems anticipated in a philosophical enquiry into the aesthetics of a *theologian*. Frankly, it can be said that a philosophical enquiry into Ratzinger's works is justified because his theology is founded on philosophical thoughts and methods.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it is Ratzinger himself who asserts that philosophy and theology are necessarily interdependent.<sup>9</sup> According to Ratzinger, the aim of philosophy is to question, not for the sake of questioning, but rather in order to arrive at an answer.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, it is the nature of philosophy to seek answers which are unattainable by reason alone. Ratzinger argues that philosophy must not shy away from discussing such realities as man's mortality, but in order to discuss such profound human realities philosophy needs a starting point, and this where theology becomes indispensable.<sup>11</sup> This relationship is reciprocal, for theology is unable to reflect on revelation and express itself without the help of philosophical reasoning.<sup>12</sup>

Briefly, then, the first part of the thesis considers Ratzinger's aesthetics in relation to classical and medieval metaphysics. The beauty of creation is a pathway to God who is the true beauty of being and the source of all beauty.<sup>13</sup> This ascent from the experience of beauty in created things to the contemplation of the divine is fostered by *eros* which unifies man in his own being.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 139.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 11, no. 4 (1984): 351, 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Artists in the Sistine Chapel," (Vatican Publishing House, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> "Deus Caritas Est," Encyclical, (2005); Joseph Ratzinger, "Liturgy and Sacred Music," 13, no. 4 (1986): 386-87.

transcendental convertibility between goodness, truth and beauty means that beauty is able to reveal what is both good and true.<sup>15</sup>

The second section of the thesis compares Ratzinger's aesthetics with that of Hume and Kant respectively. Hume considers beauty to be simply a natural sentimental response, whereas Kant finds significance in beauty only in relation to the moral subject.<sup>16</sup> Ratzinger, on the other hand, suggests that if our hearts are sincerely open to the reality of experiences, we will be able to recognize not only our desire for the infinitely beautiful, but also for the metaphysical reality of the good and the true.<sup>17</sup> To touch one's heart is to have an effect on his whole being including his sense of what is reasonable and what is morally just.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Ratzinger explains that if one is to be open to the richness of transcendent beauty, he must prepare his heart to receive it, which includes practising moral discipline and contemplative exposure to the beautiful.<sup>19</sup>

The final section of the dissertation concerns the problem of beauty in the context of Nietzschean nihilism as well as Adorno's negative dialectics. Both strongly question the transcendental understanding of beauty, Nietzsche by overturning the Apollonian–Dionysian dichotomy in favour of the Dionysian, and Adorno by posing existential and moral arguments against the beautiful.<sup>20</sup> Ratzinger is able to provide a response to these criticisms by going beyond the classical understanding of beauty and incorporating both philosophical and theological reflections that present beauty as the presentation of love and truth.

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<sup>15</sup> Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Artists in the Sistine Chapel."; Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, a Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, xii.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 67-68.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, "Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture on the Occasion of the 13th Public Conference of the Pontifical Academies on the Theme: 'The Universality of Beauty: A Comparison between Aesthetics and Ethics'," (2008).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Hohendahl, *The Fleeting Promise of Art Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited*, 99.

## Method

For the purpose of exploring Ratzinger's aesthetics I have undertaken a literature review of Ratzinger's published works available in English. Almost every speech and publication during his papacy have been translated into English, whereas many of his earlier works are yet to be translated from the German. It may be known to the reader that Ratzinger's oeuvre was recently published in German, amounting to fourteen volumes in total, but so far only the volume on the liturgy has been translated into English.

Those familiar with Ratzinger's theological works will also recognize that there has been remarkable consistency in Ratzinger's thoughts throughout his academic life, and the same can be said of his aesthetics. The Vatican website has published many formal addresses and homilies, of which there are hundreds mentioning beauty. Of particular note is an address given to The Communion and Liberation Movement three years before his election to the papacy, entitled, *The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty*.<sup>21</sup> In this speech, Ratzinger makes the point that beauty is more than a fleeting pleasure as judged by the senses. He points to Plato's understanding of participation and *eros*, and brings in Augustine to consider beauty as revealed in the face of the suffering Christ.<sup>22</sup>

This study relies on the fact that Ratzinger often discusses philosophical points in the context of a theological argument. Ratzinger gives philosophical insights relevant to his aesthetics in such notable titles as *Introduction to Christianity, Dogma and Preaching, The Spirit of the Liturgy, Principles of Catholic Theology, Nature and Mission of Theology, Eschatology, and On the Way to Jesus Christ*.<sup>23</sup> Secondary sources available in English have also contributed to my understanding

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<sup>21</sup> This address was given a new title when it appeared in a book compiling some of his work three years later: Joseph Ratzinger, "Wounded by the Arrow of Beauty: The Cross and the New 'Aesthetics' of Faith," in *On the Way to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty".

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Bibliography

of Ratzinger's thoughts on beauty, especially commentaries on his theology by Tracey Rowland, Aidan Nichols and Emery de Gaál.<sup>24</sup>

The study compares Ratzinger's aesthetics with that of Plato, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, as well as David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche and Theodor Adorno. These philosophers have been chosen in respect to Ratzinger's response to their thoughts as well as for their contribution to aesthetic philosophy. There are also contemporary philosophers and theologians mentioned in the study as they are often referred to by Ratzinger in the context of a discussion on aesthetics, for example, Josef Pieper, Romano Guardini, Luigi Giussani and Hans Urs von Balthasar. In fact, the entire thesis effectively takes the form of a literature review, and for this reason a separate chapter dedicated to such a review has been omitted.

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<sup>24</sup> Tracey Rowland, *Benedict XVI: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2010); *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*; Aidan Nichols, "The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger," Burns & Oates; Emery de Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

## **PART I - Metaphysical Beauty**

### 1.1.1 The Integration of Philosophy and Theology

The task of this study is to explore Ratzinger's philosophical thoughts on beauty, but immediately there seems to be a problem: Ratzinger is not a philosopher but a theologian, and as such his philosophical deliberations are perhaps not to be taken alone but rather simply as in support of his theological arguments. In this regard one might consider his philosophical considerations to be superficial or hardly relevant. However, if we study Ratzinger's works carefully we come across many important philosophical discussions on matters such as metaphysics, moral conscience and death, which all interrelate with his aesthetics. Furthermore, to characterize Ratzinger as a theologian simply dabbling in philosophy does little justice to the profundity of his philosophical insights. To be sure, Ratzinger does not claim to be an academic specialising in philosophy, but we shall see that this does not exhaust the meaning of a philosopher.

As already mentioned, not only does philosophy contribute to Ratzinger's own theology, but he himself contends that philosophy necessarily accompanies theology. Ratzinger says, "the integrity of faith depends on rigor of philosophical thinking, such that careful philosophizing is an irreplaceable part of genuine theological work!" Theology cannot express itself without the help of reason and the language of philosophy. Yet he also adds, "As a theologian, I do not regard philosophy as being, ultimately, a study which we pursue for philosophy's sake".<sup>25</sup> This is because, for Ratzinger, philosophy does, in fact, belong "within the wider totality" of a theological discourse.<sup>26</sup> The reason for this is that philosophy asks questions that it cannot answer by itself, and so depends on theology for its own functioning.

What is then to be said of philosophers rejecting theology and theologians claiming to practise theology without philosophy? Ratzinger attempts to demonstrate the errors of this severance, and endorses a thoroughly

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 269.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

interdependent relationship between the two disciplines. He does this principally by the way he incorporates philosophy in his own theological works. Ratzinger also provides a historical reflection explaining that in the dawn of Christianity, the contemplation of the divine was not seen as a counterpoint to the object of reason, but rather, theology converged with Greek philosophy right from the beginning.<sup>27</sup> Here, Ratzinger points to Justin Martyr who summarizes the primary task of the philosopher as asking about God and living according to the *Logos* (λόγος).<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the Christian understanding of God as *logos* gave it a great impetus to incorporate elements of Greek philosophy. Ratzinger explains that “*Logos* means both reason and word - a reason which is creative and capable of self-communication”.<sup>29</sup> This word features as the primary designation of the Son of God in John’s Gospel, and Ratzinger interprets this as characterising the Christian God as a God of reason. Therefore, theology can never be separated from reason.<sup>30</sup> Ratzinger also notes how Christianity appealed first and foremost to philosophy rather than to religious cult, such that the major dogmas of the Christian faith must be said to have emerged under Hellenistic influences.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, it must be added that the relationship is mutually dependent, for reason derives from the God who is reasonable, or rather, God is the perfection of reason itself, as Ratzinger explains,

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<sup>27</sup> Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections," Lecture of the Holy Father. Apostolic Journey to Munchen, Altotting and Regensburg: Meeting with the representatives of science in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg (September 12), (2006), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html).

<sup>28</sup> "Saint Justin, Philosopher and Martyr," General Audience, (2007).

<sup>29</sup> "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections". §5. Regensburg Address.

<sup>30</sup> *Introduction to Christianity*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 138; Cf. Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 356. Ratzinger quotes Tertullian’s argument, “Christ called himself truth, not custom”, and so stresses that Christianity had opted “for the logos as against any kind of myth” (See Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 141. Tertullian, quoted in Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 141). Interestingly, it is the same Tertullian who later famously denounces philosophy as an impediment to theology by positing “what has Athens to do with Jerusalem” (Tertullian in *De praescriptione haereticorum*, cited in Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 354.



The God who is *logos* guarantees the intelligibility of the world, the intelligibility of our existence, the aptitude of reason to know God and the reasonableness of God, even though his understanding infinitely surpasses ours and to us may so often appear to be darkness<sup>32</sup>

We can see that the historical relationship between philosophy and theology was one of integration, especially as both were understood to be “striving for the same *logos*”.<sup>33</sup>

Ratzinger observes that Augustine is a great example of the synthesis of philosophy and faith as demonstrated by the inclusion of Platonism and Neoplatonism in his theology.<sup>34</sup> However, after Augustine there is a depreciation of this interrelationship. In fact, by the time of Thomas Aquinas, theology and philosophy are seen as separate fields altogether, with each distinguished by their respective domain of enquiry: supernatural revelation for the former, and natural reason for the latter.<sup>35</sup> For John Duns Scotus, faith and reason need not correlate as God is completely free and not bound to reason or to goodness. Scotus dispenses with Thomas’ analogy of being and suggests that our sense of goodness

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<sup>33</sup> Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 139. Here, Ratzinger further explains that “The God who is *logos* guarantees the intelligibility of the world, the intelligibility of our existence, the aptitude of reason to know God and the reasonableness of God, even though his understanding infinitely surpasses ours and to us may so often appear to be darkness” [*Ibid.*].

<sup>34</sup> “Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections”. §7. Ratzinger explains that it is not only scripture that influences Augustine toward the love of the faith, “But also philosophy, especially that of a Platonic stamp,” which “led him even closer to Christ, revealing to him the existence of the *Logos* or creative reason” (“Saint Augustine of Hippo (5),” General Audience, 5 (2008).)

<sup>35</sup> Ratzinger contends that since this time, “philosophy has been assigned to the area of pure reason and theology to the area of revelation” (Ratzinger, “Faith, Philosophy and Theology,” 353.).

and truth cannot in any way reflect the all-powerful God because his essence is utterly transcendent.<sup>36</sup>

Continuing this into the sixteenth century Martin Luther makes the relationship between philosophy and theology absolutely void because metaphysics is rejected in the pursuit of a simpler faith.<sup>37</sup> With the advent of Kant's radical subjectivism, metaphysics loses its place as a legitimate means of philosophical enquiry altogether. Kant seeks to express pure reason uncontaminated by *a priori* assertions of faith, after which Martin Heidegger labels "Christian philosophy" a paradox, suggesting that philosophy's purpose is to question rather than to explain an already accepted answer.<sup>38</sup> Heidegger therefore calls for a new philosophy of "absolute questioning", which he considers "the highest form of knowledge".<sup>39</sup>

### 1.1.2 Ratzinger's Response

Ratzinger argues contra Heidegger that posing questions and then attempting to remain uncommitted to a solution is a dishonest way to do philosophy. He suggests that rather than merely questioning, the true philosopher is one who is unafraid of finding an answer.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the philosopher only achieves his goal by engaging with reality, and it is precisely the philosopher's task to approach reality as it is, undeterred by apparent difficulties and limitations. Ratzinger then proposes that the philosopher must attempt to understand the mystery of death, the fate of all man. Yet since man is incapable of seeing beyond

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<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections". §7. Scotus proposes univocity of theological predication and so adheres to the radical metaphysical difference between God and man.

<sup>37</sup> Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 356; Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections". §9.

<sup>38</sup> Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 353.

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, *Die Selbstbehauptung der Deutschen*, 12 quoted in Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy: Classical Wisdom Stands up to Modern Challenges* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 115.

<sup>40</sup> Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 351, 55.

the horizon of death Ratzinger believes the Christian testimony of the resurrection must be considered a “spur” for deeper philosophical enquiry.<sup>41</sup>

For the same reason, Ratzinger argues that the *a priori* of religious traditions should not be dismissed out of hand, but instead should be treated as welcome stimuli for philosophy. Ratzinger asks "How can philosophical thought be set in motion without some *a priori* concepts".<sup>42</sup> Ratzinger further explains,

...reason must listen to the great religious traditions if it does not wish to become deaf, dumb and blind precisely to what is essential about human existence. There is no great philosophy which does not draw life from listening to and accepting religious tradition. Wherever this relation is cut off, philosophical thought withers and becomes a mere conceptual game.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, a philosophy that seeks the truth honestly and humbly would be willing to entertain an answer, even if it originates from divine revelation. As such, Ratzinger proposes that the Christian faith can lead to a deeper understanding concerning the reality of death, and so guide philosophy in the pursuit of truth. He says,

For philosophy and, albeit in a different way, for theology, listening to the great experiences and insights of the religious traditions of humanity, and those of the Christian faith in particular, is a source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 354.

<sup>42</sup> Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 357; Here, Ratzinger may also be referring to Dietrich von Hildebrand, who asserts that “The object of philosophy is primarily of an *a priori* nature” (Dietrich von Hildebrand, *What Is Philosophy?* (Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), 63.)

<sup>43</sup> "Truth and Freedom," *Communio* 23, no. 1 (1996): 31; Cf. Josef Pieper, *For the Love of Wisdom: Essays on the Nature of Philosophy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 68-73.

<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections". §15. Ultimately for Ratzinger, “Philosophy, the search for meaning in the face of death, presents itself as the search for Christ” (Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 351.).

Ratzinger refers to Josef Pieper concerning this. According to Pieper, philosophy seeks to make sense of whatever we encounter, and so is naturally open to an answer deriving from theology.<sup>45</sup> Pieper points to Sartre as a counter-example and accuses him of denying the existence of God “uncritically and without the shadow of any justification”.<sup>46</sup> Pieper contends that in such a case, the philosopher’s rejection of theology “takes on the character of a creed, whether or not one is aware of it and comfortable with it”.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, just as philosophy cannot answer itself when it poses questions concerning death and eternity, theology is inevitably grounded in philosophical methods and language. The attempt to dissociate theology from the limits of philosophy, exemplified by Martin Luther and Karl Barth, cannot succeed because philosophical thought necessarily pervades theology. If either discipline is to genuinely pursue the truth, it must recognize that the counterpart is indispensable for its own functioning. They are complementary and neither can claim to be an exclusive approach to truth.<sup>48</sup>

Ratzinger explains that it is fitting that philosophy and theology work together in “a reciprocal and advantageous collaboration”.<sup>49</sup> It is no accident that Aidan Nichols posits that, ultimately, Ratzinger wishes to unite “philosophy and theology in a single, internally differentiated but also internally cohesive, intellectual act.”<sup>50</sup> If philosophy and theology are not mutually exclusive sciences,

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<sup>45</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy: Classical Wisdom Stands up to Modern Challenges*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 356.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict XVI, "Saint Thomas Aquinas (2)," General Audience, (2010).

<sup>50</sup> Aidan Nichols, *The Conversation of Faith and Reason: Modern Catholic Thought from Hermes to Benedict XVI* (Hildenbrand Books, 2011), 288. Also see p. 193, where Nichols defines a central theme in Ratzinger's works as "a convergence of the mainly philosophical disclosure of logos with the chiefly theological revelation of love"; Cf. Tracey Rowland, "The Role of Natural Law and Natural Right in the Search for a Universal Ethic," in *Searching for a Universal Ethic: Multidisciplinary, Ecumenical, and Interfaith Responses to the Catholic Natural Law Tradition*, ed. J. Berkman and W.C. Mattison (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 165. This should help clear up some doubts concerning a philosophical enquiry into the works of a theologian.

but rather, jointly conducted disciplines aiming at the one truth of reality, then a theologian must be reflecting on and referring to philosophical thoughts in his works. This is very much true in the case of Ratzinger, and this study aims to demonstrate in particular the way Ratzinger integrates philosophy and theology in his approach to the problem of beauty.

### 1.2.1 Transcendental Participation

According to Ratzinger, the experience of beauty occurs through the process of remembrance (*anamnesis*), which is a natural tendency in man towards transcendence, a “godlike constitution of our being” pointing away from oneself.<sup>51</sup> He says,

This anamnesis of the origin ... is not a conceptually articulated knowing, a store of retrievable contents. It is so to speak an inner sense, a capacity to recall, so that the one whom it addresses, if he is not turned in on himself, hears its echo from within. He sees: ‘That’s it! That is what my nature points to and seeks.’<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Conscience and Truth," *Communio* 37, no. 3 (2010): 535.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. In this article, Ratzinger replaces the medieval term “synderesis” with the above concept of “anamnesis” (p. 534). He also explains that “anamnesis” is the exact word used by Paul in his letter to the Romans describing the conscience of the Gentiles, whereby they have held “a law to themselves—not in the sense of modern liberal notions of autonomy that preclude transcendence of the subject, but in the much deeper sense that nothing belongs less to me than I myself” (Romans 2:14ff). By highlighting the word “*anamnesis*”, Ratzinger illustrates that natural law is a kind of *memory* of the primordial forms; one that is outward focused, and which is able to draw out of oneself the desire for something greater, precisely as he recognizes that his being is rooted in something greater than himself. In being drawn by this desire for greatness, he simultaneously becomes aware that he is answerable to something natural and intrinsic to oneself. Here, Ratzinger is writing, not in psychological terms, but in ontological terms. The conscience belongs to our essence as human beings. In other words, we have an “inner ontological tendency” toward the good, which describes what is popularly referred to as our “moral compass” (p. 535).

At the same time, in our experience of beauty we are only given a glimpse of its perfection and we are left pondering what the fullness of infinite beauty might be. Ratzinger refers to Aristophanes from Plato's *Symposium*, who explains that "lovers do not know what they really want of one another", for the heart only has "a vague perception of what it truly wants and wonders about it as an enigma".<sup>53</sup>

Ratzinger further explains that the experience of beauty is an encounter that is primarily passive, "a shock" that comes from outside of us. He describes it further as being "touched, or rather wounded... the arrow of nostalgia pierces man, wounds him and in this way gives him wings, lifts him upwards towards the transcendent".<sup>54</sup>

This concept derives from Plato's description of the beauty in the *Phaedrus*. According to Plato, beauty arouses a remembrance of the world of the Forms and gives the soul the power to ascend to it.<sup>55</sup> Now, the Forms are perfect and incorruptible *beings*, whereas objects in visible space and time are simply *becoming*.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, one can say that the Form is *in* the visible object, and conversely the object *possesses* or *shares in* the Form.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, visible beauty for Plato can be considered beautiful "because it partakes of (*metechei*) The Beautiful Thing", and it is only "by The Beautiful thing that all beautiful things come to be beautiful".<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §7.

<sup>54</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §6; Josef Pieper, *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness: On the Platonic Dialogue Phaedrus*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston. (South Bend: St Augustine's Press, 2000), Ch. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Phaedrus* 247a-e, in *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness: On the Platonic Dialogue Phaedrus*, Ch. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Grabowski, *Plato, Metaphysics and the Forms*, 28: Grabowski cites Plato's *Cratylus*, 440c; *Phaedo*, 65d-e; *Republic*, 485b; *Philebus*, 59a-c; *Timaeus*, 27d-28a, 29b-d.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 36: Grabowski cites Plato *Gorgias*, 506d,4, 467e7; *Lysis*, 217b6,c5; *Euthydemus*, 280b2, 301a4; *Cratylus* 389b10, 389c1, 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Phaedo*, 100c5-6, as quoted in *ibid.*, 34. Cf. *Phaedo*, 100d6-8: There is debate as to whether Plato considers *ousia* a higher form of existent particulars or simply the universal of the sensible counterparts (*ibid.*, 32-33.).

We must also mention Plotinus, for whom the semblance of the creative One is marked in creation in such a way that the visible world becomes a sign of and pathway to the invisible One.<sup>59</sup> Plotinus is particularly important here because of his influence on Augustine, who replaces the One with the Christian God, such that sensible beauty originates from God himself.<sup>60</sup> Augustine brings together his knowledge of philosophy and the Scriptures to assert that the beauty of creation “proclaims that its maker could have been none other than God, the ineffably and invisibly beautiful”.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the beauty of the invisible creator can be seen *through* the visible created world.<sup>62</sup> This is the basic metaphysical understanding of participation which grounds Ratzinger’s aesthetics.

According to Ratzinger, whatever is truly beautiful owes its beauty to the God who is supreme beauty. In an eschatological sense, the beauty of the world we see is passing and the perfect and infinite beauty of God awaits us, but at the same time, Ratzinger suggests that the theory of participation is not about escaping the material world in a dualistic sense.<sup>63</sup> In the same way, we must note that although Plato’s development of the idea of beauty culminates in man’s capacity to transcend the world of appearances, the means of achieving this is precisely via

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<sup>59</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* V, 8, 9. as referred to in Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1992), 37.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 42: Here, Harrison makes reference to Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, II, 43, 45.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 11.4 quoted in Aidan Nichols, "Redeeming Beauty Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics," Ashgate. Nichols, *Redeeming Beauty*, 9. Here, Nichols also refers to Carol Harrison’s citation of Augustine’s *Sermones* 241, 2; *Confessiones* X, 6., and *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 61, 17.

<sup>62</sup> Augustine, *Retractationes*, I. 6. in *ibid.*, 6: “Through the intermediary of corporeal things I myself wanted to attain or lead others to attain, incorporeal things”. For this reason, Augustine warns that we are not to look *at* the beauty of creation lest we lose forget the true source of beauty. God’s beauty is reflected in the world as we know it because creation reveals the Creator (Augustine, *Confessions*, X); Cf. Pontifical Council for Culture, "Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly: The Via Pulchritudinis, Privileged Pathway for Evangelization and Dialogue," (2006).

<sup>63</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §19-21.

the sensory world.<sup>64</sup> As Ratzinger explains, the experience of beauty is not about leaving the world behind, but rather implies being “anchored in the world yet open to God” and thereby transcending the division “between the beauty of things and God as beauty”.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, Ratzinger suggests that an important function of art is to facilitate an encounter with the transcendent God. He says,

A work of art is a product of the creative capacity of the human being who in questioning visible reality, seeks to discover its deep meaning and to communicate it through the language of forms, colour and sound. Art is able to manifest and make visible the human need to surpass the visible, it expresses the thirst and the quest for the infinite.<sup>66</sup>

Ratzinger points to the works of Antoni Gaudi as instances of beautiful art that stimulates *anamnesis* through the visible forms of “stones, lines, planes, and points”.<sup>67</sup> Ratzinger also reflects how in a Gothic church, “we are enraptured by the vertical lines that soar skywards and uplift our gaze and our spirit, while at the same time we feel small yet long for fullness...”<sup>68</sup>

Ultimately, he says to artists,

Authentic beauty... unlocks the yearning of the human heart, the profound desire to know, to love, to go towards the Other, to reach for the Beyond.

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<sup>64</sup> Pieper, *Enthusiasm and Divine Madness: On the Platonic Dialogue Phaedrus*, Ch. 6. Pieper maintains that the erotic emotion, this same overpowering emotion which gives wings to the soul and leads it back home to the abode of the gods, has the character of passion, of ravishment by something in the visible world, and that therefore—like all other “passions”—it springs from the body and the senses.

<sup>65</sup> Benedict XVI, “Apostolic Journey to Santiago De Compostela and Barcelona - Eucharistic Celebration on the Occasion of the Dedication of the Church of the Sagrada Familia and the Altar in Barcelona,” Homily, (2010).

<sup>66</sup> Benedict XVI, “Art and Prayer”.

<sup>67</sup> “Apostolic Journey to Santiago De Compostela and Barcelona - Eucharistic Celebration on the Occasion of the Dedication of the Church of the Sagrada Familia and the Altar in Barcelona”.

<sup>68</sup> “Art and Prayer”.



If we acknowledge that beauty touches us intimately, that it wounds us, that it opens our eyes, then we rediscover the joy of seeing, of being able to grasp the profound meaning of our existence, the Mystery of which we are part.<sup>69</sup>

Ratzinger explains refers this process by which we encounter God in the experience of beauty as the *via pulchritudinis*, “the way of beauty”.<sup>70</sup> The deep thirst and quest for the infinite can only be quenched by the delight in the union with God himself, who is “Beauty ever ancient, ever new”.<sup>71</sup>

### 1.2.2 Transcendental Convertibility

Along with the theory of participation, Ratzinger’s thoughts on beauty refer to the metaphysical principle of transcendental convertibility. This is the concept that presents beauty’s interchangeable relationship with goodness and truth. It has origins in Ancient Greek metaphysics, and is seen in Plato’s writings on truth, goodness and beauty as eminent or divine Forms, as well as in Aristotle’s *metaphysics*, where he sets the transcendentals apart from his ten categories of existence.<sup>72</sup> Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, explains that being, truth and goodness are the same reality, although differing in concept; being denotes the object’s very existence and essence, truth expresses its knowability, and goodness its desirability.<sup>73</sup> As for beauty, there is some doubt as to whether Thomas

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<sup>69</sup> "Meeting with Artists in the Sistine Chapel."

<sup>70</sup> Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Artists in the Sistine Chapel."

<sup>71</sup> "Message of the Holy Father for the 49th World Day of Prayer for Vocations," (2011). Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, X27.28, as well as, Emma Jane Marie Spargo, *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1953), Ch.1.

<sup>72</sup> Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas: In a Historical Perspective*, 57-58. Plato mostly considers the concept of transcendentals as exemplified in the relationship of the Good with the True and the One; See, for example, Plato on truth in *Phaedrus* 247b-247e; on goodness cf. *Phaedo* 72c-82e; on beauty cf. *Symposium*, 211c-212e; Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* III.

<sup>73</sup> Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 29-34

considers it a transcendental along with goodness and truth.<sup>74</sup> John Dadosky and Leo Elders both suggest that the reason behind Thomas' omission of beauty from his list of transcendentals might be due to his conviction that beauty is in some way different from the other transcendentals.<sup>75</sup> This conclusion seems to be in agreement with Ratzinger's aesthetics, especially as it relates to Balthasar's understanding of beauty. Ratzinger alludes to this in his papal address to artists, where he cites Balthasar's description of beauty as forming "a halo, an untouchable

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<sup>74</sup> John D. Dadosky, *The Eclipse and Recovery of Beauty: A Lonergan Approach* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 33-36. Dadosky reviews various authors' explanation for Thomas' omission of beauty in his list of transcendentals. Kovach, in his *Philosophy of Beauty* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974) suggests that the systematic treatment of the transcendentals occurs very early in Thomas' writings in the *De Veritate*, and this early reference does not suffice to convince one of his judgment on beauty as a transcendental later in life. Kovach goes on to point out that, in fact, Thomas expresses that every being is good and beautiful, just as for Plato, and so Thomas must consider beauty a transcendental along with goodness and truth. Furthermore, he explains that the beautiful and the good are equal in such a way that everything good is beautiful and everything beautiful is good. That is, they are identical and hence convertible, but merely conceptually different, which is congruent with his thoughts on the transcendental. Others express similar views to Kovach on Aquinas' consideration of beauty as a transcendental, for example Armand Maurer says, "Beauty is a transcendental mode of being, accompanying being wherever it is found, so that every being is beautiful insofar as it exists" (Armand Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation*, Houston, Texas: Center for Thomistic Studies, University of St. Thomas, 1983, 34). Jan Aertsen objects that the omission of beauty from the list of transcendentals in *De Veritate* is conclusive enough and that Thomas definitely did not consider beauty a transcendental (Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, Leiden: E.K. Brill, 1996, 335-59.). Jacques Maritain explains that Thomas subordinates beauty under the transcendental of goodness, but that nevertheless beauty is a transcendental (Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, Trans. J. W. Evans, New York: Scribner & Sons, 1972, 172). Umberto Eco agrees, writing that for Thomas, "beauty adheres to being only through the mediation of the good" and specifies that for Thomas, "beauty adheres to being only through the mediation of the good" (Umberto Eco, *Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 37).

<sup>75</sup> Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas: In a Historical Perspective*, 142; Dadosky, *The Eclipse and Recovery of Beauty: A Lonergan Approach*, 36: "While I agree with Kovach that Aquinas arrived at beauty later in his career, I also think that if beauty is a transcendental, it may well be a different type of transcendental, in the way Bonaventure perhaps was suggesting when he speaks of beauty as the splendour of the transcendentals together."

crown around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another”.<sup>76</sup>

According to Balthasar, “unity, truth, goodness and beauty do not belong as properties possessed at one’s own disposal”, but rather point “to the primordial ground of being which replicates itself in it in an image”.<sup>77</sup> This primordial ground of being is God himself, which means in each individual being the transcendentals disclose the imprint of the divine being.<sup>78</sup> This disclosure occurs through the being’s form, which is both its beauty and its essence:

Being inevitably includes being of a certain kind (*species*) or, what comes to the same thing, a form (*forma*), two words which imply both “essence” and “Beauty” and are immediately understood by Augustine in this duality (*speciosus* and *formosus*), “beautiful”, “well-formed”.<sup>79</sup>

This dual characteristic of the form is also recognised by Thomas Aquinas, who says in his *Summa Theologiae*:

Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical fundamentally; for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently goodness is praised as beauty. But they differ logically, for goodness properly

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<sup>76</sup> "Meeting with Artists in the Sistine Chapel."; Cf. Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, a Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the Form*, 18.

<sup>77</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 4* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 374. Balthasar quotes from *De Veritate* q 22, a 2, ad 2: “Being itself is a likeness of the divine goodness”; Cf. Angelo Campodonico, "Hans Urs Von Balthasar’s Interpretation of the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* 8 (2010): 43.

<sup>78</sup> Stephen Fields, "The Beauty of the Ugly: Balthasar, the Crucifixion, Analogy and God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (2007): 174; Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume 2: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 333f.

<sup>79</sup> *The Glory of the Lord : A Theological Aesthetics. Volume 2 : Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, 115; Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, 38: Augustine explains that visible beauty participates in the beauty of its creator in these two ways – in its appearance or external form, as well as in its essence as created being, which corresponds with the Greek word, *Idea*.

relates to the appetite (goodness being what all things desire); and therefore it has the aspect of an end (the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen. Hence beauty 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.<sup>80</sup>

In summary, the desirability of the form refers to the good, and the relationship of the form to the mind signifies its beauty. Furthermore, truth is concerned with the knowability of essences, and the beauty of the form in due proportion acts as a means to its knowability. This suggests that it is precisely through the object's beauty that being is revealed as good and true. Elders points to this idea when he says, "To the extent that the beautiful is ordered to the cognitive faculties it is related to the true, while to the extent that it satisfies the appetitive faculty, it is related to the good".<sup>81</sup> In other words, beauty is a transcendental precisely in its capacity to present both the good and the true.

According to D. C. Schindler, Balthasar develops on this notion by describing the event of desiring the good and being drawn by the truth in terms of the "subjective-objectivity" of the beautiful.<sup>82</sup> The subject, through his senses, grasps the form, but then is "enraptured" by the splendour of eternal being which draws the subject into a deeper encounter.<sup>83</sup> This "Splendour reveals itself fundamentally as a sign for the appearing of a depth and a fullness that transcends

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1, 5, 4 ad 1, in Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas: In a Historical Perspective*, 142: Thomas continues, "Now since knowledge is by assimilation, and similarity relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause"

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. For Elders, this is what makes beauty unique as a transcendental in Thomas' thoughts.

<sup>82</sup> Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation*, 409: "Beauty is the whole that allows each to be dependent on each other".

<sup>83</sup> Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, a Theological Aesthetics, I: Seeing the Form*, 119.

our reach”.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, in the subject’s contemplation of the form, the form itself reciprocates by the irruption of splendour from within.<sup>85</sup>

There is an interaction, then, between the subject and object, such that it is not only the observer who approaches the beautiful, but it also happens that the beautiful approaches the observer. In order to see the objective truth, one must be “drawn out of himself toward the object”, and this is only possible if one is affected by the good, that is “the simultaneity of desire and self-gift”.<sup>86</sup> The encounter with beauty enables this meeting between the subjective desire for the good and the objective vision of truth.<sup>87</sup>

This is very important for Ratzinger, who points out that Plato’s notion of philosophy as the pursuit of eternal Being with the strength of *eros* is in fact compatible with the Christian life. The philosopher’s task is to seek the truth understood as “Being itself, or even more - the Good and the Beautiful that are beyond Being”.<sup>88</sup> The search for goodness and beauty is in fact both a moral activity and a search for God, for “The beauty of the works of which the Gospel speaks, refers beyond them to another beauty, truth and goodness whose

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 117f.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 151: “The beautiful is above all a form, and the light does not fall on this from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the form’s interior.”

<sup>86</sup> Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation*, 409.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 360. Here, Ratzinger offers the “beyond being” as an “even more”, which could imply that Ratzinger considers the notion of “beyond being” contained in eternal Being itself. That is, Being itself is infinitely above beings, and so it cannot be considered simply the greatest among beings. Since, according to the terms of analogy, our understanding of being and substance is appropriately applicable to God without diminishing his transcendence, then eternal Being implies beyond-being at the same time. Either way, when Ratzinger says that God is beautiful or that he is Beauty, he is not attempting to define and hence restrict God under own concepts as Heidegger might allege, nor is he speaking in equivocal terms. What he means is that God is indeed beautiful, but in an analogous sense, beyond our imagination, and every experience of beauty points to this reality.

perfection and ultimate source is in God alone”.<sup>89</sup> Ratzinger finds this idea on the Greek term *kalà erga*, which is used in Scripture to mean both good and beautiful at the same time. The moral activity of man is made beautiful when it is acted in accordance with truth, for “the beauty of works manifests and expresses, in an excellent synthesis, the goodness and profound truth of the action, as well as the coherence and holiness of those who perform it”.<sup>90</sup>

The convertibility of the transcendentals, then, is highly relevant for positing the interrelation between the aesthetic and moral realms of human life. This is important for Ratzinger who believes the separation between aesthetics and ethics presents a major crisis in our time. He says,

The need and urgency for a renewed dialogue between aesthetics and ethics, between beauty, truth and goodness, is once again proposed to us not only by the current cultural and artistic debate but also by daily reality. In fact, the split emerges dramatically at different levels and at times there is a glaring contrast between the two dimensions: the search for beauty, understood reductively as an external form, as appearance, to be sought at all costs, and that of the truth and goodness of actions carried out to achieve a specific goal.<sup>91</sup>

Ratzinger believes that the problem of aestheticism and a degrading moral life are associated with the separation of beauty from truth and goodness. Moral relativity

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<sup>89</sup> Benedict XVI, "Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture on the Occasion of the 13th Public Conference of the Pontifical Academies on the Theme: 'The Universality of Beauty: A Comparison between Aesthetics and Ethics'."

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. Ratzinger continues, “Indeed, a quest for beauty that was foreign or divorced from the human quest for truth and goodness would be transformed, as unfortunately happens, into mere aestheticism and above all, for the youngest, into an itinerary that focuses on what is transient, banal and superficial in appearance or even to an escape towards artificial paradises that mask and hide inner emptiness and inconsistency. Such an illusive and superficial search certainly would not have a universal breadth but would inevitably prove to be totally subjective if not actually individualistic and would sometimes even end in incommunicability”

depends on the perceived separation of moral goodness from truth. However, even when the relationship between conscience and truth is respected, truth itself becomes liable to err when beauty is neglected. Ratzinger describes this situation by recalling the medieval idiom, “reason has a wax nose”, which is to say that, “it can be pointed in any direction, if one is clever enough”.<sup>92</sup>

Ratzinger believes that we can be aided in our pursuit of the truth and the good by being wounded by the arrow of beauty. Beauty reminds us of the truth and goodness of being and of God, and so gives us the desire to respond with all our heart. If by their convertibility in being, beauty is true and truth beauty, then the encounter with beauty must be a rational experience. Ultimately, Ratzinger explains that, “The beautiful is knowledge certainly, but, in a superior form, since it arouses man to the real greatness of the truth”.<sup>93</sup> This is connected with Ratzinger’s understanding that “being itself is true, in other words apprehensible, because God, pure intellect, made it, and he made it by thinking it”.<sup>94</sup> In other words, the knowledge imparted by the encounter with beauty is the knowledge of being, and of God, the *logos*, the foundation of all reason, which goes beyond the knowledge of facts and of human history.<sup>95</sup>

Thus far we have considered Ratzinger’s understanding of beauty as derived by the metaphysical presentation of both philosophy and Christian theology. Ratzinger holds that beauty is a transcendental, and this means our experience of it can draw us on beyond the material world and become an encounter with being itself, which is to say, an encounter with God, who is *logos*. As such beauty can give us knowledge of God, and direct us towards truth and goodness. In the next

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<sup>92</sup> Ratzinger, “The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty”. §12.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., §8.

<sup>94</sup> Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 59. Ratzinger argues against the relativistic notion of truth conceived simply as contextually appropriate man-made concepts. Truth, according to Ratzinger is prior to and beyond man who cannot even fathom his own existence without it, for indeed, “Man did not create the cosmos” (p. 61), rather, it is “*logos* of the creative spirit” that “governs his being” (p. 59).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 59-63.

chapters, we will discuss whether this knowledge derived from beauty is indeed rational, and how this knowledge might be different from that of facts and history.

### 1.2.3 Analogy of Being

To help appreciate Ratzinger's integration of philosophy and theology as reflected in his thoughts on beauty, we must understand the concept of analogy by which theological truths are expressed in metaphysical terms. Ratzinger says,

All human knowing is accomplished with reference to and within this world. Consequently, if human knowing is to make a statement about something that is not "world", it can do so only with the materials of this world; it cannot grasp that something in its proper being, as it is in itself, but only by means of approximations and similarities that exist within worldly being, therefore "analogously" in comparisons and images.<sup>96</sup>

This operation of language to express the relationship between being and God refers the notion of *analogia entis* (analogy of being).<sup>97</sup> According to the Thomistic tradition, it is the linguistic corollary of the metaphysical principle of participation, whereby human words describing God are thought to participate in the fullness of the original principle predicated of God.<sup>98</sup> Ratzinger notes how in any description of God the "unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language".<sup>99</sup> In other words,

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<sup>96</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life* (Ignatius Press, 2011), 262.

<sup>97</sup> Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*, 14: In Ratzinger's inaugural lecture of 1959, he explains that the analogy of being is "a necessary dimension of Christian reality" because Christ is *Logos*. This means that Ratzinger considers metaphysics indispensable for theology.

<sup>98</sup> Leo Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St. Thomas Aquinas: In a Historical Perspective*, trans. John Dudley (E.J. Brill, 1993), 47.

<sup>99</sup> Ratzinger is referring to the Fourth Lateran Council which stipulates that it is possible to speak of God so long as we recognize that his unlikeness (to man and creation) is greater than any



analogy of being works because there is a genuine relationship between the reason and language of the spirit and the reason and language of nature.<sup>100</sup>

*Analogia entis* has a particular relevance for Martin Heidegger who opposes the attempt to equate God with being. Heidegger calls it “onto-theology” and considers it intrinsically flawed because it is a metaphysics that “determines how the deity enters into it” and does not give room for the *Dasein* to conceal and disclose itself in its own terms.<sup>101</sup> More specifically, Heidegger’s concern is not that onto-theology arrogantly endeavours to make sense of God, but that it does not even attempt to understand being.<sup>102</sup> For Heidegger, Christian philosophy abuses ontology because it only borrows it as a way of falsely grounding a preconceived theology.

Here, again, we must turn to Balthasar, a theologian commended by Ratzinger for his work on aesthetics among other things. Balthasar responds to Heidegger by suggesting that the metaphysics of being is not to be seen as a restriction of God, but conversely, as a means of conveying precisely God’s transcendence.<sup>103</sup> For

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likeness (“Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections”. §7.) Ratzinger also provides a longer summary of analogy with reference to Thomas Aquinas: “The correctness of theological reasoning and its real cognitive meaning is based on the value of theological language which, in St Thomas’ opinion, is principally an analogical language. The distance between God, the Creator, and the being of his creatures is infinite; dissimilitude is ever greater than similitude (cf. DS 806). Nevertheless in the whole difference between Creator and creatures an analogy exists between the created being and the being of the Creator, which enables us to speak about God with human words.” (“Saint Thomas Aquinas (2)”).

<sup>100</sup> “Christian Universalism: On Two Collections of Papers by Hans Urs Von Balthasar,” in *Joseph Ratzinger in Communio. Volume 1, Unity of the Church*, ed. David L Schindler (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010), 133.

<sup>101</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 56. Cf. David C. Schindler, “Wie Kommt Der Mensch in Die Theologie?: Heidegger, Hegel, and the Stakes of onto-Theo-Logy,” *Communio* 32, no. 4 (2005): 643.

<sup>102</sup> David C Schindler, “Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Metaphysics, and the Problem of onto-Theology,” *Analecta Hermeneutica* 1, no. 1 (2009): 111.

<sup>103</sup> David C. Schindler, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation* (Fordham University Press, 2004), 365ff.: Balthasar describes being as that which both discloses and conceals itself in the world of beings. Schindler says, “It is

Balthasar, God is not actually being, but rather, beyond being.<sup>104</sup> When we say that God is being, it must be taken analogously for the true meaning of being is beyond us. Ratzinger takes this up in his own consideration of God and being, which has implications on his understanding of beauty. We shall see that, for Ratzinger, the philosopher's God of pure Being is transcended by the God of faith. Ultimately, Ratzinger integrates his theological understanding with philosophy for a unique perspective on beauty as person, where the divine and transcendent beauty is not only the delight of *eros*, but also simultaneously *agape*, a love that goes to the end.

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Balthasar who, in his *Glory of the Lord*, challenges Heidegger's critique by suggesting that metaphysics *thinks* God in terms of being rather than restricting him to being. The principle of *analogia entis* establishes a relationship with the being of the world and the being of God, but it does not abrogate God's transcendence in any way. In fact, precisely by its commitment to analogy, *analogia entis* affirms God's infinite difference. In this way, the validity of metaphysics is upheld."; Cf. Schindler, "Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Metaphysics, and the Problem of onto-Theology," 110.

<sup>104</sup> "Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Metaphysics, and the Problem of onto-Theology," 111.

## **PART II - Reason and Experience**

## 2. Introduction

In Part One, we explored the theory of participation and the convertibility of the transcendentals, which together form an important part of Ratzinger's metaphysical aesthetics. As discussed, Ratzinger is very much influenced by classical and medieval philosophers, most notably Plato, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>105</sup> In line with these thinkers, Ratzinger considers metaphysics indispensable for philosophy. Of course, man is unable to ascertain truth in its entirety, and yet, like Plato, "he can love it and search for it" and that is what he considers the activity of a true philosopher.<sup>106</sup> He says, "philosophy is a great reaching out for eternal Being, a learning to contemplate truth, a rational effort of the Spirit to find true meaning".<sup>107</sup>

However, there are various theories of aesthetics allegedly detached from metaphysical principles. For instance, David Home focuses on the experience of man at the expense of reason, and so presents an aesthetics based on sentiment, while Kant places the mind at the centre of experience and so offers a purely subjective aesthetics. Metaphysical beauty is also rejected by the positivists because it is not in accordance with scientifically verifiable knowledge. Ratzinger's metaphysical aesthetics is therefore in conflict with a number of modern aesthetic theories. The remainder of the study will explore how these theories relate to Ratzinger's thoughts on beauty.

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<sup>105</sup> It is important to note that Ratzinger does not reject Thomas' principles of metaphysics, especially that on the analogy of being. The simple conjecture that Ratzinger is more Augustinian than a follower of Thomas merely represents the fact that Ratzinger prefers a holistic approach comprising of imageries than the dry conceptual formulations of scholasticism. Cf. Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 4-5.

<sup>106</sup> Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 360. Cf. Ulrich Wilckens, "Sophia", in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 7:407-408.

<sup>107</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 360.

## 2.1 David Hume

Let us start by considering David Hume, who gives an empiricist account of causality, faith and standards of taste based on the principle of induction. That is, “that all our simple ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent”.<sup>108</sup> For instance, Hume suggests that our adherence to theories of causality come about from repeated experience of conjunctive events, however, they are in fact nothing but an assumption connecting past experiences and projecting them to future ones. According to Hume, then, theories of causality cannot be considered valid if we are to follow the rules of logic.<sup>109</sup>

Hume applies similar empirical principles to explain the notion of beauty, which is a concept arising from man’s experience of a particular pleasure. Now, he distinguishes two sources of pleasure and hence two types of beauty, the first being simply taking pleasure in the external form of an object. This pleasure is a sentiment that arises “by the *primary constitution* of our nature”, that is, as part of a physiological response to perceiving an object with a particular order to its constituent parts.<sup>110</sup> The second and more common experience of beauty derives from the imagination’s delight in the object’s apparent utility.<sup>111</sup> In sum, Hume reduces beauty to a sensation owing to man’s physiological nature and his capacity for imagination.

In order to validate his thoughts on beauty Hume adds an explanation for the validity of intersubjective judgements.<sup>112</sup> He comments that there are “general

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<sup>108</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, I.i.I, 9, quoted in Paul Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste Kant's Response to Hume* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 201.

<sup>109</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, I.iii.6, 62, quoted in Paul Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 202.

<sup>110</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, II.ii.5, 235, quoted in Paul Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 204.

<sup>111</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, II.ii.5, 235, quoted in Paul Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 204.

<sup>112</sup> Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste Kant's Response to Hume*, 205-06.

rules of art” which are “founded only on experience and the observation of the common sentiments of human nature”, and yet the aptitude to recognise these general principles vary in degree from subject to subject.<sup>113</sup> He then proposes a number of conditions that might make one an ideal critic, including a sound mind, thorough exposure to art, delicate senses, and the lack of ill prejudice.<sup>114</sup> Hume believes these criteria limit the correct perception of the beautiful to the competent critic and so avoids the relativist position that “a thousand different sentiments excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object”.<sup>115</sup>

However, it is difficult to reconcile the rejection of relativity with Hume’s own basic contention that “beauty is no quality in things themselves”.<sup>116</sup> Although Hume postulates the existence of rules or principles by which an art critic is to be selected and so supposes that someone at least can judge an artwork as beautiful or not, the rules themselves are empirically derived. In other words, Hume’s strictly empiricist approach to philosophy leaves no room for a metaphysical consideration of beauty.

### **2.1.1 Ratzinger on the Value of Experience**

Ratzinger takes the experience of man seriously as removed from any theories of science and so is in agreement with Hume in many ways. Ratzinger knows that speculative thought can be too rigid and ultimately meaningless, as exemplified in the “dryness of a type of scholasticism” that have become “stale and brittle”.<sup>117</sup> That is why, when speaking on freedom’s accountability to the truth, Ratzinger

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<sup>113</sup> Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”, in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. E. Miller, (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1985), 230 in Zangwill, “Aesthetic Realism 1,” 78.

<sup>114</sup> Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste Kant's Response to Hume*, 205-06.

<sup>115</sup> Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”, in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. E. Miller, (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1985), 230 in Zangwill, “Aesthetic Realism 1,” 78.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Foreword,” in *The Soul of a Lion: Dietrich Von Hildebrand : A Biography*, ed. Alice Von Hildebrand (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 12.

says, “let us refrain from setting to work with abstract philosophical considerations. Rather, let us try to approach an answer inductively starting from the realities of history as they are actually given”.<sup>118</sup> He goes as far as to say that “all human knowledge must have a sensory structure; it must have its beginning in experience, in the perception of the senses”.<sup>119</sup>

For Ratzinger, a proper understanding of beauty arises from one’s sense experience of it. He thus points to his very own experience of beauty and considers it valid evidence for characterising it as a potent and intimate encounter that leads to the contemplation of God. One particular experience which stands out for Ratzinger is that of a Bach concert conducted by Leonard Bernstein in 1981. Ratzinger recalls:

When the last note of one of the great Thomas-Kantor-Cantatas triumphantly faded away, we looked at each other spontaneously and right then we said: ‘Anyone who has heard this, knows that the faith is true’.<sup>120</sup>

In this experience of beauty, Ratzinger claims to an acute awareness of the truth without mediation, or rather, the reality of the faith manifest in the beauty mediated by sound and the senses. Now, if the aim of philosophical abstraction is to understand reality and provide a reasoned expression to describe it, then it can only be considered secondary and analogous to that actual reality, or an instance

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<sup>118</sup> Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 23. Philosophical abstractions are relevant only insofar as it responds to questions of concrete importance, as Ratzinger says again of freedom, “It is not merely abstract philosophical considerations, but the quite concrete situation of our society, which compels us to ask such questions” (p. 20).

<sup>119</sup> This dependence on sense knowledge is not empiricism, but rather an understanding of knowledge founded on Thomas Aquinas’ definition of the soul as the form of the body. Ratzinger agrees with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas’ notion that everything we know comes from sense experience: “There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses” (*Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 343-44).

<sup>120</sup> "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §13. Ratzinger was at this concert with the Lutheran Bishop Hanselmann who was also struck by the beauty of the music. The concert was dedicated to Karl Richter, who had recently died.

of it. This is why theories of metaphysics can only develop in an attitude of openness to the concrete experience of reality.

At the same time, to reflect on one's personal experience alone and to ignore the experience of others is to restrict the scope of one's understanding. Therefore, Ratzinger refers to the value of collective human experience in the writings of past and contemporary thinkers. We are responsible for evaluating the thoughts and traditions that are part of our culture, but this is not a simple task given that even our evaluation is conditioned by the same culture we live in. We cannot shake it off and begin only with experiences. Each person is born into a society with a specific culture established by others before him, and so it is clear that human knowledge does not start from scratch, or *tabula rasa*.<sup>121</sup> This means that the evaluation of experience by pre-conditioned patterns of thought must be verified by further contemplation of the experience. In other words, thought and experience work together to achieve an understanding of reality. That is why Ratzinger comes to the knowledge of the transcendentals from his own encounter with reality and by engaging with the various traditions of philosophy and theology.<sup>122</sup>

### 2.1.2 Abstract Thinking

Since the intention to remove abstract thinking derives from abstraction, one can only pretend that empiricism does away with abstract thought. Nevertheless, Ludwig Wittgenstein's positivism attempts to devalue abstract thinking by reducing philosophical thought to the analysis of ordinary language. As philosophy becomes more and more detached from the pursuit of metaphysical

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 247-49.

<sup>122</sup> On the importance of testimony, Ratzinger says, "Relying on those who see, we advance gradually toward him, and the buried memory of God, which is written on the heart of every man, awakens more and more to life in the depths of our own being", and then he explains the importance of own testimony, our own lived experiences: "When we live close to God, our sight is restored: when we use our eyes, they bear witness to his truth" (Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 115-16.).



truth, any proposition that is not inherently comprehensible within the ordinary meaning of the terms used is deemed too abstract and irrelevant to a positivistic philosophy. That is, without metaphysics, an argument might be judged by its grammatical logic rather than its appeal to truth. Moreover, truth itself becomes simply another term that can be discarded.

Ratzinger, therefore, argues against positivism saying that, “by its exactness, exact knowledge bars the way to wisdom, which asks about the most profound depth of our existence”.<sup>123</sup> The positivist’s exact knowledge depends more on established theories from repeated sensory observation as opposed to any kind of immediate sensory experience because the latter is considered prone to error. So while on one hand positivism presents a materialist view of the world, on the other hand, it undermines the significance of the very sensory experience which it alleges to derive knowledge from. The push for scientific thinking has established a dichotomy then between thought and experience, such that every experience, from the sensory to the spiritual, is deemed untrustworthy.

Ratzinger points out that with the support of the scientific successes in today’s technological era, positivism has taken a strong hold in popular thought. All propositions that are strictly scientific theories are considered completely relative, as Ratzinger explains, “natural science has nourished a skepticism with regard to everything which cannot be explained or proved by its exact methods: all such things seem in the end to be a mere subjective assignment of value which cannot pretend to be universally binding”.<sup>124</sup> This becomes a pertinent factor in diminishing the metaphysical and theological role of beauty.

Ratzinger proposes that beauty, like the truth, is a metaphysical reality. To be precise, it is a transcendental coextensive with being, which means beauty precedes our experience of it. This can be stated with respect to both inductive and deductive methods of reasoning. If one becomes aware of this, he may be

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<sup>123</sup> *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 360. Here, “exact knowledge” does not refer to material or sensory information as such, but to scientifically verifiable facts.

<sup>124</sup> (sic.) "Truth and Freedom," 16.

able to open his sense of reason and encounter beauty's full transcendental grandeur. However, this is only possible if we understand the capacity for experience to be a rational encounter in and of itself, rather than being limited to being a scientific endeavour to establish facts.

To accept this, we must recognize that reason and experience are not at odds with each other, but nor are they reducible to the one or the other. In fact, they nourish each other so that one can perceive reality as it is. This is how the philosopher uses reason well, that is, by precisely contemplating the "totality of things we encounter".<sup>125</sup> Luigi Giussani, a philosopher highly respected by Ratzinger, explains that "Experience itself, in its totality, leads to the authentic comprehension of the term *reason* or rationality".<sup>126</sup> Therefore, experience of reality is necessary to reasoning. Reason is something that "illuminates the factors within" reality, and is characterised by "unexhausted openness" to the real. This openness even extends to the recognition that reality surpasses man's capacity to understand it.<sup>127</sup>

Ratzinger speaks similarly in his citation of Nicolas Cabasilas' two ways of acquiring knowledge. The first way is pedagogical which does not depend on the direct experience of things, whereas the second way allows the formation of a more certain knowledge and is gained only "through a direct relationship with the reality".<sup>128</sup> The two ways can be conceptually distinguished, but they are both faculties of the one reason. To contemplate beauty is in no way "a flight into the

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<sup>125</sup> Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy: Classical Wisdom Stands up to Modern Challenges*, 15.

<sup>126</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press 1997), 97; Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, "Funeral Homily for Msgr. Luigi Giussani," *Communio* 31, no. 4 (2004): Giussani's understanding of reason reflects back on his appreciation of beauty, which is referred to by Ratzinger in his funeral homily for Giussani. He says: "Father Giussani grew up in a house that was—to use his words— poor in bread but rich in music, so that from the very beginning he was touched, or, better, wounded, by the desire for beauty. He was not satisfied, however, with just any ordinary beauty, with beauty however banal; he sought rather Beauty itself, infinite Beauty, and thus he found Christ. In Christ he found true beauty, the path of life, true joy" (p. 685).

<sup>127</sup> Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 132.

<sup>128</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §9.

irrational".<sup>129</sup> This is the kind of thinking that reduces the consideration of beauty to a mere sentiment.

Ratzinger contends that one needs the cooperation of reason if he is to recognize true beauty. This reason is one that is open to the rational character of the experience. He asserts that "We are fighting to expand reason, and hence for a reason which, precisely, is also open to the beautiful and does not have to set it aside as something quite different and unreasonable".<sup>130</sup> Now, to expand reason means to recognise the full capacity of reason to do more than analyse causation, process empirical data and calculate logical algorithms.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, Ratzinger suggests that reason can achieve more than linguistic organization and conceptual thought. This is shown by its application in the experience of the beautiful. According to Ratzinger, the aesthetic experience is a fundamental activity of reason, such that, "Reason that intended to strip itself of beauty would be halved, it would be a blinded reason".<sup>132</sup>

According to Ratzinger, "man's being resonates with some things and clashes with others".<sup>133</sup> This does not imply that the response to beauty is simply relative, but rather, that man is naturally directed towards beauty and needs to become aware of his own nature. Ratzinger suggests that one way we can verify this is to deeply reflect on our experiences:

Not all satisfactions have the same effect on us: some leave a positive after-taste, able to calm the soul and make us more active and generous. Others, however, after the initial delight, seem to disappoint the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., §16.

<sup>130</sup> Benedict XVI, "Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone," (2008).

<sup>131</sup> *Introduction to Christianity*, 59-63.

<sup>132</sup> "Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone".

<sup>133</sup> "Conscience and Truth," 535.

expectations that they had awakened and sometimes leave behind them a sense of bitterness, dissatisfaction or emptiness.<sup>134</sup>

The experience of beauty is one that is considered absolutely rational, but not in any restrictive sense of it being calculated or analysed logically, even though it is also significant in these terms as one uses reason to reflect on one's experiences. Ultimately, however, the experience of beauty calls for a renewed understanding of reason itself; one that sees it not simply as a process of abstraction, but a power to appreciate one's experiences at the level of being.

## **2.2 Immanuel Kant**

### **2.2.1 Aesthetic Judgment: Free Play and Universal Validity**

Whereas Hume elevates the role of the sentiments and passions, so that at the same time reason is in demise, Kant proposes the activity of the mind as the entire occupation of man. Kant's subsumption of experience under the categories of abstract ideas leads to the dismissal of metaphysics as a viable means to interpret aesthetic judgments. As such, Kant's aesthetics can be said to have much in contrast with Ratzinger's perspective on beauty. From a reflection on these differences we shall see that, for Ratzinger, the recognition of beauty as a transcendental is made possible by the heart, the meeting place of the rational and the subjective at the centre of man's being.

Kant begins his theory of aesthetics in his so-called "third critique", the *Critique of Judgment*, by positing pleasure as the element by which the judgment of the beautiful can be distinguished from any other experience.<sup>135</sup> This pleasure, he

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<sup>134</sup> General Audience of Pope Benedict XVI, 7 November 2012.

<sup>135</sup> Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, xii.

claims, is not merely a physiological response to sensory stimuli, as Hume suggests, but something that is produced from the harmonious interaction of the senses with the rational faculties of imagination and understanding.<sup>136</sup> Kant calls this interaction “free play” because the understanding is free to unify the various aspects of beauty presented by the imagination.<sup>137</sup> Pleasure, or the feeling of satisfaction, is associated with free play because it gives us the impression of having arrived at a natural goal of understanding as if in conceptual thought. However, the harmony achieved by the imagination and understanding occurs without any deference to empirical concepts. Now, whilst we owe the pleasure of beauty to an intuition of unity within the mind as if it was forming new concepts, any actual conceptual thought fosters interest, which in turn renders the observer unable to judge beauty. This is because beauty is only experienced in a state of complete disinterestedness.<sup>138</sup>

Like Hume, Kant wishes to avoid the conclusion that taste is completely relative. Therefore, he develops these thoughts further to give an account of the intersubjective validity of the judgment of taste. As mentioned, for this judgment to be made, one must approach the object with complete disinterestedness. Kant believes that when this condition is met, the agent who experiences pleasure in the judgment of beauty will necessarily presume that the same judgment will be made by anyone else who observes the same object in the same environment. In other words, the judgment of pleasure arising from the perception of an object is accompanied by a simultaneous *a priori* judgment that this pleasure will be experienced by all others.<sup>139</sup>

In other words, if one were to think to oneself: “This object is wonderfully beautiful, but I’m sure my sister wouldn’t find it beautiful,” it could be said that he has not experienced beauty at all, but has mistaken for the judgment of taste a pleasure owing to some other interest. This is because, according to Kant, the

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 147.

judgment of beauty *necessarily* supposes universal validity.<sup>140</sup> He says, “in a judgment of taste, the pleasure which we feel is imputed to others as necessary, just as if it were a property of the object, determined to [belong to] it according to concept”.<sup>141</sup> This can be considered Kant’s way of ensuring that the judgment of taste is not simply seen as a relative construct that differs without rule from subject to subject.

Now, the question arises: does Kant believe that a genuine encounter with beauty actually results in universal agreement in practice? That is, if one approaches an object with disinterestedness and feels a pleasure accompanied by a judgment of universal validity, does it mean everyone will agree with it in reality? If so, then we are living in different worlds, or nobody could claim to have properly experienced beauty, simply given the fact that opinions vary as to whether something is beautiful or not. Well, actually, Kant clarifies that “The universal voice” is only an “idea”, such that:

...he who believes himself to be making a judgment of taste actually judges in accord with this idea, may be uncertain; but that he relates his judgment to such an idea, insofar as it is a judgment of taste, it is proclaimed by his expression of “beauty”. For himself he can be certain through his mere consciousness of the abstraction of everything pertaining to the agreeable and the good from the delight remaining to him; and this is all for which he promises himself the agreement of everyone: a claim which under these conditions he would also be justified in making, were it not that he often sinned against them and therefore made an erroneous judgment of taste.<sup>142</sup>

The judgment of universal validity is therefore only an assumption that accompanies the judgment of the beautiful, which does not actually imply the agreement of subjective tastes in practice. The apparent discrepancies in taste are

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<sup>140</sup> Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 8-9, 111-12.

<sup>141</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, §9, 219, quoted in Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 143 (Brackets Guyer’s).

<sup>142</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, §8, 216, quoted in Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 129.

attributed to erroneous judgments. This occurs when the pleasure one feels is improperly attributed to the beauty of an object, that is, when the object is not approached with disinterestedness. So, in such cases, the pleasure that is mistakenly attributed to beauty actually comes about from the satisfaction of some other interest.<sup>143</sup> Kant stands by his theory of universal validity and considers it an important aspect of the judgment of taste as an *a priori* judgment.

On the one hand, Kant presents the judgment of taste as a subjective experience that does not correspond to determinate properties of the object, such as symmetry or colour.<sup>144</sup> On the other hand, for the universality of the judgment to apply to other subjects, even from a subjective non-practical standpoint, there is a need for grounding the judgment on a broader concept that incorporates both the experience of the subject and the object considered on its own. Kant proposes a solution in “the concept of the supersensible”, which becomes the transcendental ground for “the object (and the judging subject as well) as object of sense, and thus as appearance”.<sup>145</sup> He considers the supersensible sufficient to resolve the conflict, for provided the concept is indeterminate, the judgment of taste is not dependent on a particular property of objects.<sup>146</sup> Now, the supersensible is a concept which “cannot be determined by intuition, through which nothing can be known, and thus also from which no *proof* of the judgment of taste *can be drawn*”.<sup>147</sup>

However, in postulating the perception of beauty by mediation of a transcendental in Kant’s own understanding of the term, Kant moves the aesthetic judgment into

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<sup>143</sup> Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 129-30.

<sup>144</sup> Beauty can only be considered the *grammatical* subject and predicate of the object, “as if it were a property of the object”. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §9, 219, quoted in Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 143; Cf Guyer, p. 119.

<sup>145</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, §57, 339-340, quoted in Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 301. For Kant, the term “transcendental” denotes the perspective by which *a priori* concepts are accepted despite pertaining to the noumenon (which is beyond the boundary of knowledge).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.; Cf. *The Critique of Judgement*, §57, 340-341.

<sup>147</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, §57, 339-340, quoted in Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 301.

the realm of metaphysics, and therefore goes beyond self-imposed conditions of subjective epistemology.<sup>148</sup> Despite this internal inconsistency, Kant maintains that beauty is not a metaphysical reality but rather the subjective experience of pleasure conditioned by disinterestedness and universal validity. As with Hume, then, it becomes apparent that Kant's supposition of subjective validity is problematic without a metaphysical foundation.

### 2.2.2 Ratzinger's Response: The Heart

What Kant considers unknowable, is for Ratzinger, truly knowable in the heart. Indeed, Ratzinger proposes that the heart, rather than the mind, is the primary faculty of man. This is because the heart is the centre of man as a whole, inseparably body, soul and spirit.<sup>149</sup> It is in the heart that the senses unite with the emotions.<sup>150</sup>

Ratzinger refers to Origen's adaptation of the Stoic concept of *hēgemonikon*, which is the guiding energy of *logos* dwelling in man's heart. Here, heart expands beyond reason to a deeper reality that has direct connection with the divine.<sup>151</sup> As such, Ratzinger asserts that the encounter with beauty is more than a momentary pleasure arising from disinterest. The experience of beauty imparts a knowledge of truth which is felt and intuited by the heart in a manner that is rational and yet beyond reason. Therefore, Ratzinger explains that the "impact produced by the response of the heart in the encounter with beauty" is "true knowledge".<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, 304. Again, transcendental here implies Kantian sense of a perspective concerning the things-in-themselves rather than in the medieval sense of properties convertible with being. Guyer believes that the metaphysical solution to the dialectic is unnecessary and suggests that Kant could have simply discarded the supersensible altogether and so avoid overstepping "the limits of his own epistemology" (p. 311).

<sup>149</sup> Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, 60-61.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>152</sup> "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §11.



Ratzinger adds to the understanding of the heart by referring to John Henry Newman's motto, "heart speaks to heart", as well as the words of Blaise Pascal, "The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of... We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart".<sup>153</sup> Both Newman and Pascal are speaking of the knowledge of God, which Ratzinger considers to be true knowledge. Romano Guardini expands upon Pascal's treatment of the heart, and given that Guardini's influence on Ratzinger is undeniable, we will briefly examine the contribution of Guardini here..<sup>154</sup>

Guardini explains that the faculty of the heart is associated with the appreciating mind, whilst the faculty of reason is concerned with the theoretical mind. Nevertheless, both are "mind", and so can be properly considered receptive to knowledge. Like Ratzinger, Guardini's reflection on the heart centres upon the knowledge of the truth, especially the truths of the faith. Guardini even suggests that this is the kind of knowledge which fulfills a person:

...the element of value in the divine: the 'highest good'; that which, in the nearness of God, is unique, inwardly stirring, which fulfills. That, in other words, which modern philosophy of religion calls the quality of the 'numinous', the value of the 'sacred'.<sup>155</sup>

Guardini continues his reflection on Pascal by giving a hierarchical presentation of knowledge:

...just as Augustine only became clearly aware of this state of affairs when he had found the faith, and was in a position to judge from this higher level of knowledge the possibilities of the lower level, so it was the event of the Memorial which gave Pascal, along with the experience of the state of spiritual knowledge, also the judgment about the accomplishment and limitation of the earlier kind of knowledge [ie. the rational arguments].

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<sup>153</sup> *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, 67-68.

<sup>154</sup> John L. Allen, *Pope Benedict XIV: A Biography of Joseph Ratzinger* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 38.

<sup>155</sup> Romano Guardini, *Pascal for Our Time* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 134.

The state of affairs often referred to already recurs: existence is constructed in levels. The significance and possibilities of the lower disclose themselves fully only on the higher level. Life cannot be understood from the bottom up, that is, in a naturalistic way or according to a theory of evolution, but only from the top down, that is, hierarchically.<sup>156</sup>

When God is perceived in the beauty of nature, one begins to see with a new eye, a new “*vue*” opens up, or what Guardini refers to as, “the pneumatic illumination of mind and heart in faith”.<sup>157</sup> From this perspective, one stands high enough to see clearly all that belongs to the lower tiers of knowledge. This is a key consequence of beauty’s transcendental convertibility with truth. That is, the impact of beauty on our hearts can become a guide to the truth. Ratzinger emphasizes this when he says,

The encounter with the beautiful can become the wound of the arrow that strikes the heart and in this way opens our eyes, so that later, from this experience, we take the criteria for judgement and can correctly evaluate the arguments.<sup>158</sup>

The heart wounded by beauty can have such a deep knowledge of the truth that it becomes capable of being an arbiter of reason. This means that when we encounter beauty, reason is not put aside, but rather it is broadened so as to make a judgment from a higher level. For Ratzinger, this is demonstrated in his own personal experience of beauty. Again, referring to the Bach cantata conducted by Leonard Bernstein, he says,

The music had such an extraordinary force of reality that we realized, no longer by deduction, but by the impact of our hearts, that it could not have

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 114-15.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>158</sup> Ratzinger, “The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty”. §13.

originated from nothingness, but could only have come to be through the power of the Truth that became real in the composer's inspiration.<sup>159</sup>

Ratzinger thus proclaims that beauty is a means for the judgment of truth in all matters because it is real knowledge that impacts the heart. We can then add this to the understanding of beauty as an encounter that wounds the beholder and leaves him yearning for truth. The heart's capacity to know this truth through the power of beauty means that this yearning is not in vain.

### 2.3.1 Kant and the Sublime

It would be unfair to say that Kant considers beauty a simple pleasure of no value, for the judgment of taste points to an aspect of knowledge for Kant as well; and that is the knowledge of practical reason. However, the aesthetic signification of morality occurs primarily in the sublime, which is another aspect of the judgment of taste in addition to the beautiful. The sublime offers an interesting parallel to the connection between morality and aesthetics based on the transcendental metaphysics that underpins Ratzinger's aesthetics. According to Kant, the sublime describes the state of pleasure associated with encountering something of great magnitude or something perceivably threatening.<sup>160</sup> We have said that the pleasure associated with beauty arises from free play of the understanding and imagination. In the sublime, the mechanism by which we feel that pleasure is more complex because it involves a component of displeasure. Kant explains that whereas "the beautiful is directly attended with a feeling of life, and is thus

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. Ratzinger speaks of the same experience nine years later, saying "At the end of the last passage, one of the *Cantatas*, I felt, not by reasoning but in the depths of my heart, that what I had heard had communicated truth to me" (Benedict XVI, "Art and Prayer").

<sup>160</sup> Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 210.

compatible with charms and a playful imagination,” in the experience of the sublime, “the mind is not simply attracted but also alternately repelled by it”.<sup>161</sup>

Kant explains that the faculty of understanding contributes to empirical knowledge but is limited to logical analysis and conceptual thought. The faculty of reason, on the other hand, is the highest faculty of the mind and is able to unify the manifolds of sensibility, as well as inquire into both theoretical and practical properties of reality.<sup>162</sup> In the sublime, the experience is so overwhelming that the understanding is unable to unify the experience in guiding the imagination. This means that instead of initiating the process of free play, the sublime calls upon the higher faculty of reason. However, the imagination is unable to synthesise the sensory information to satisfy the enquiry of reason, which leads to frustration and displeasure.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, this painful feeling of frustration and inadequacy is only short-lived, for it paradoxically gives way to an appreciation of one’s own subjective reason as being superior to any perceivably threatening experience, and this is what causes the eventual pleasure.

There are two distinct situations in which one experiences the sublime. The mathematical sublime occurs when one encounters a numerical series or measurement, which overwhelms the observer by its sheer magnitude. However, in acknowledging the inadequacy of the imagination to represent the infinitely large, the theoretical reason becomes aware of its own dominance over the imagination, and this recognition results in pleasure.<sup>164</sup> In other words, the feeling of awe and pleasure in the experience of the mathematical sublime is a result of our appreciation of the faculty of reason over and above the incalculably vast. Kant explains that it is precisely because reason is able to recognize itself in the

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<sup>161</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §23, 6:244-5 quoted in Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 204.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* Kant stresses that this is not a judgment of reason per se because in the sublime it is the imagination which is at work, and reason is represented only indirectly such that “one is not always conscious of its presence” (*The Critique of Judgment* §28, 5:262 in Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 214).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

face of something inestimably large that it is able to exert the “supremacy of the rational determination of our cognitive faculties over the greatest power of sensibility”.<sup>165</sup>

Unlike the beautiful, the judgment of the sublime is not grammatically attributable to any object.<sup>166</sup> That is, the sublime is not a term with which we can describe a scene or object, but simply an experience. Therefore, one cannot say “this object or scene is sublime”, but only “I feel the sublime in observing this scene”. Kant also explains that the experience of the sublime is merely associated with the subjective feelings generated, such that the object’s “existence is a matter of indifference to us”.<sup>167</sup> He suggests therefore that an awesomely fearful representation of nature only plays a causal role in evoking a certain “disposition of the soul”.<sup>168</sup> This explains how, in the mathematical sublime, the “mere magnitude, even if it is regarded as formless is able to convey a universally communicable delight”.<sup>169</sup>

A similar effect is experienced in the dynamical sublime, which occurs when a powerful scene in nature incites a response of fear but the scene is simultaneously judged by the practical reason as non-threatening. An example of this can be given in the case of seeing out to a stormy sea from the shore. If the practical reason recognises that the storm is at a safe distance, then the observer would experience a counter pleasure that overcomes the initial awe and fear. The experience of the dynamical sublime, then, owes itself to the practical reason, which not only discloses the very existence of reason but asserts its superiority over nature, resulting in “soul-stirring delight”.<sup>170</sup>

According to Kant, the recognition of sublimity is embedded in our nature, but it is dependent on the disposition of the practical reason which is one’s sense of morality. The mathematical sublime, in encountering the infinitely great, reveals

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<sup>165</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §27, 5:257, in *ibid.*, 210.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-21.

<sup>167</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §25, 5:249, in *ibid.*, 222.

<sup>168</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §25, 5:250, in *ibid.*, 218.

<sup>169</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §25, 5:249, in *ibid.*, 221.

<sup>170</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §28, 5:261-62 in *ibid.*, 213.

the inexhaustible scope of reason, whilst the dynamical sublime, in confronting the might of the natural world, represents the autonomy of reason.<sup>171</sup> This autonomy of reason over and above nature confirms that we can exercise our practical reason freely in spite of what appears to be a natural boundary. According to Kant, the sublime represents the reason's "superiority over nature on which is founded a self-preservation of quite another kind than which may be attacked and brought into danger by the nature outside us, one where the humanity in our own person remains undefeated".<sup>172</sup> It allows us to believe that nature is a "might that has no dominion over us", and hence helps support Kant's notion that our moral freedom is always preserved by the supremacy of practical reason.<sup>173</sup>

The judgment of beauty signifies the rational condition of morality by disclosing pleasure as the natural consequence of disinterestedness, which then "teaches us to find a free delight in objects of the senses without the charm of sense".<sup>174</sup> In other words, the experience of pleasure in one's disinterested approach to an object analogously represents the rational condition of acting in response to duty rather than from any other interest. Paradoxically, however, moral signification in the beautiful is limited because deontic morality is at odds with the prospect of pleasure as a reward. The sublime overcomes this tension precisely because it has

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>172</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §28, 5:261-62 in *ibid.*, 214.

<sup>173</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §28, 5:260, in *ibid.*, 262.

<sup>174</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §59, 5:354 in *ibid.*, 255. Kant describes this as a paradoxical phenomenon of beauty's "purposiveness without purpose", for it gives pleasure without assimilation to a virtue or a refinement of judgment, and yet because the imagination takes up the sensations and from them causes pleasure and so "appears as if for a certain purpose" - Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 947; Oleg Bychkov, *Aesthetic Revelation: Reading Ancient and Medieval Texts after Hans Urs Von Balthasar* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 21-22. Kant explains that an analogy exists "between the pure judgment of taste, which, without depending on any interest, allows a delight to be felt and also to be represented *a priori* as proper to all mankind in general, and the moral judgment, which does the same from concepts" (Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §42, 5:301, in Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality*, 267).

the element of pain and displeasure. This means that the signification of moral aptitude is much stronger in the sublime.<sup>175</sup>

For Kant, aesthetic taste symbolizes morality and not the other way around, but he proposes that moral principles set the standards by which aesthetic taste is developed. He says, “The true propaedeutic for the grounding of taste is the development of moral ideas and the culture of moral feeling: for only when these are brought into accord with sensibility can genuine taste assume a determinate, constant form”.<sup>176</sup> As such, one’s moral inclinations are represented in our taste for beautiful art.<sup>177</sup> For Kant, morality is exemplified in deontic principles and so one’s response to duty is represented in the disinterested attitude required for the judgment of taste.

In summary, Kant suggests that the judgment of beauty is dependent on the observer’s disinterestedness which helps distinguish the judgment from a pleasure arising from the consideration of the object’s utility. The disposition of disinterestedness is ameliorated by acting in accordance with moral duty or practical reason, but Kant adds that the connection between morality and aesthetics is mostly unidirectional in the aesthetic judgment’s signification of the deontic moral principle. This makes for an interesting comparison with Ratzinger’s understanding of the moral-aesthetic connection, which is neither dependent on disinterestedness nor deontic principles. This relationship between beauty and moral goodness will be discussed in detail in the following section.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Judgement* §60, 5:356 in *ibid.*, 255.

<sup>177</sup> This is despite the fact that Kant dismisses the value of art in forming moral interests. He suggests that art as a human product is affected by unavoidable human interests: if not for the sake of vanity, then for the purpose of establishing a community of people with agreeable tastes (*ibid.*, 256).

### 2.3.2 Ratzinger on Beauty and Morality

According to Ratzinger, beauty is a transcendental, convertible with both the true and the good. With regards to morality, then, beauty signifies and affects one's disposition towards moral goodness and vice versa. Therefore, Ratzinger suggests that excellent moral habits and frequent exposure to beautiful things have a mutual affect on the disposition for and appreciation of the other. The negative correlation also holds true, such that a culture smothered in ugliness sways further away from receptivity to the moral truth, and a morally corrupt society becomes blind and unable to recognize the beautiful, thereby establishing a vicious cycle.

For Ratzinger, this short-sightedness in aesthetic and moral sensibilities has its roots in the notion of subjective existence in accordance with Kant's elevation of the reason and the subjective mind as the supreme power over nature. Ratzinger argues that if everything is subjective then "truth and absolute points of reference do not exist" and "this way of thinking does not lead to true freedom, but rather to instability, confusion and blind conformity to the fads of the moment".<sup>178</sup> Ultimately, the "fads" take the form of a relative moral order facilitated by the "fragility of consensuses" and imposed by those who "assert their claim to be the sole rightful representatives of progress and responsibility".<sup>179</sup> Ratzinger therefore asserts that "the reduction to experience traps the human person in the subjective", for when one's subjective senses and reflections are not held together with the objective truths of reality, an attitude of subjective relativity attack goodness and beauty.<sup>180</sup>

The resultant moral relativity that dominates the culture attenuates our ability to recognise the beautiful, and the lack of appreciation for the beautiful in turn blinds us further from the recognition of moral truth. These are features of what

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<sup>178</sup> Benedict XVI, "Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Twenty-Sixth World Youth Day (2011) on August 6, 2010," (Vatican Publishing House2010).

<sup>179</sup> Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," 32.

<sup>180</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Culture and Truth: Some Reflections on the Encyclical Letter, *Fides Et Ratio*," *The Patrician*, February 1999.



Ratzinger calls “anti-culture” or “an overbearing cultural bias,” which distorts man’s ability to recognise the transcendentals.<sup>181</sup> He says,

....contemporary mankind is characterized by disunity, by a superficial coexistence and a hostility that are based on self-divinization. As a result, everything is seen in a false perspective.<sup>182</sup>

Ratzinger purports that we are often brought down to our carnal instincts by the cacophony of banal stimuli. He claims that “Our world is so full of what immediately impinges on our senses that we are in danger of seeing only the parts and losing sight of the whole”.<sup>183</sup> If the tendency toward selfishness is unabated, one may end up “full of the rubbish of his own cares and interests”, and so become unable to hear the voice of the transcendent which requires a pure heart and an open soul.<sup>184</sup>

Therefore, Ratzinger urges people to appreciate the truth of faith and to the truth of morality, not primarily by demands and cries to conform but by proposing a culture of beauty. As mentioned, an exposure to beauty not only cultivates our taste for the beautiful, but it also sharpens our perception of the good and the true. Ratzinger explains that, “beauty, a kind of mirror of the divine, inspires and vivifies young hearts and minds, while ugliness and coarseness have a depressing impact on attitudes and behaviour”.<sup>185</sup> If morality affects our vision of beauty, then our aesthetic experience affects our alignment with what is truly moral. This is in line with Augustine and Bonaventure’s idea that when encountering the beautiful, we ourselves are made beautiful, and when it gazes at the hideous it is made hideous.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> "Liturgy and Sacred Music," 387; "Conscience and Truth," 536.

<sup>182</sup> *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 319.

<sup>183</sup> *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 283.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>185</sup> Benedict XVI, "Message for the 41st World Communications Day: Children and the Media - a Challenge for Education," (Vatican Publishing House, 2007); Cf. "Address to the Participants of the Annual Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications," (2007).

<sup>186</sup> Spargo, *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, 43.

Ratzinger suggests that since man grows and develops within a culture, a good cultural education in beauty is possible through “a kind of pedagogy of desire”, which may help open the heart to the transcendental dimension. On the practical level, Ratzinger proposes the following:

Instilling in someone from a young age the taste for true joy, in every area of life – family, friendship, solidarity with those who suffer, self-renunciation for the sake of the other, love of knowledge, art, the beauty of nature — all this means exercising the inner taste and producing antibodies that can fight the trivialization and the dulling widespread today. Adults too need to rediscover this joy, to desire authenticity, to purify themselves of the mediocrity that might infest them.<sup>187</sup>

This is the *via pulchritudinis*, the way of beauty, mentioned in the first chapter as beauty’s inspired path to the knowledge of transcendent joy. Ratzinger hopes that we may come to know the importance of education concerning beauty in art and nature and so be able “to discover or rediscover the taste of the authentic joy of life”.<sup>188</sup> With regards to art, Ratzinger pays particular attention to the value of icons and Christian masterpieces which can set us on “on an inner way, a way of overcoming ourselves”, making the “purification of vision that is a purification of the heart”.<sup>189</sup>

Artists, then, have a prominent role to play in the restoration of authentic beauty in culture. Ratzinger therefore reminds artists that their task is “to awaken wonder and the desire for the beautiful, to form the sensibility of souls and to nourish a passion for all that is an authentic expression of the human genius and a reflection of divine Beauty”.<sup>190</sup>

The encounter with the infinite can also be had in our experience of beauty in nature. This means societies must preserve the beauty of nature by working to

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<sup>187</sup> Benedict XVI, "The Year of Faith. The Desire for God".

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 82.

<sup>192</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 82.

create a balanced urban landscape. This is the responsibility of every one of us, to bring to the fore the beautiful in art and nature so that a culture of joy flourishes.<sup>191</sup>

In order to create such a culture of beauty, Ratzinger expresses that beauty must be sought for itself and each person must exercise adequate discipline to this end. He explains that beauty is “endlessly comforting precisely because it has no compulsion to be useful, because it does not owe its existence to a leisure we have devised for our own”.<sup>192</sup> This disinterestedness is not a criteria for a judgment of pleasure elevating the subjective mind as Kant suggest, but rather, the evidence that beauty precedes man and his desire to make use of things for himself. Indeed, beauty does not need to be justified, and yet the contemporary world demands a reason for it. This is the result of a culture driven by positivism convincing the people that a scientific rationality is the main paradigm for generating meaning in material progress, and because the frequent abuse of beauty such as its manipulation for the sake of pomp, power and profit has bred profound cynicism.<sup>193</sup>

Ratzinger borrows ideas from Paul Evdokimov to comment on how we might be able to avoid the temptation to desire material progress alone as well as to avoid the bane of cynicism by purifying our hearts through meditative prayer. Evdokimov calls this prayer “a fasting of sight” whereby one is able then to see with one’s heart also and not only with his eyes. An Eastern Christian iconographer must engage in such a prayer when creating an icon, for “An icon does not simply reproduce what can be perceived by the senses”.<sup>194</sup> Ratzinger explains that:

Inner perception must free itself from the impression of the merely sensible, and in prayer and ascetical effort acquire a new and deeper capacity to see, to perform the passage from what is merely external to the

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<sup>192</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 82.

<sup>192</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 82.

<sup>193</sup> "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §21.

<sup>194</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §14.

profundity of reality, in such a way that the artist can see what the senses as such do not see, and what actually appears in what can be perceived: the splendour of the glory of God...<sup>195</sup>

This silent contemplation becomes a “purification of vision that is a purification of the heart”, and the iconographer becomes capable of seeing “an inner way, a way of overcoming ourselves”.<sup>196</sup> This silent contemplation can then help the heart reach the same purity of vision that then renders it capable of perceiving the beauty that is at once true and good.

Consistent with his thoughts on *anamnesis* and the arrow of beauty which can lead us to the infinite, Ratzinger advises that individuals should aim to nurture a healthy restlessness for “a higher good, a deeper good — and at the same time to perceive ever more clearly that no finite thing can fill our heart”.<sup>197</sup> Exposing oneself to the beauty of art and nature must go hand in hand with the desire for transcendent beauty. We will be able to perceive this deeper goodness and truth in beauty if our hearts are prepared to receive it.

In summary, Ratzinger’s conception of beauty is not one which is simply connected to morality by way of signification. It is far more relevant to the moral realm than that, for to experience the beautiful is to see the truth and to be directed towards moral good. In order to perceive the beautiful, however, one must purify his heart so that it is not dismissive and cynical. A culture that allows for this purification is one where authentic beauty is enjoyed from a young age and where each person is encouraged to reflect upon his feelings and experiences. By such means, one may be able to live the moral life and hence become beautiful themselves, and not only that but be referred to “another beauty, truth and goodness whose perfection and ultimate source is in God alone”.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., §15.

<sup>197</sup> Benedict XVI, "The Year of Faith. The Desire for God."

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

## **PART III - Beauty and Existence**

### 3.1 Friedrich Nietzsche

#### 3.1.1 Greek Tragedy and the Dionysian

Ratzinger and Nietzsche are both critical thinkers who find the aesthetic experience absolutely crucial in the contemplation of the deepest questions of existence. Ratzinger, however, finds many errors in Nietzsche's thoughts, especially concerning the nature and meaning of *eros*, and in addition to exposing these problems to light, Ratzinger forwards a counterargument in favour of Christianity and Platonic metaphysics.

Nietzsche proposes that ancient Greek tragedy is the pre-eminent art form, because, unlike the hollow and fake beauty of Christianity and classical music, Greek tragedy affirms life as it is, with all its suffering and evil.<sup>199</sup> Nietzsche believes that it is from tragedy that we can derive "the solace that in the ground of things, and despite all changing appearances, life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable".<sup>200</sup> He therefore asserts that "art – and not morality – is the true metaphysical activity of man", and that "Indeed, the world is justified (*gerechtfertigt*) only as an aesthetic phenomenon".<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, "art is a

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<sup>199</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), Book V, §370, pp. 27-29.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 39; Cf. Paul Raimond Daniels, *Nietzsche and the Birth of Tragedy* (2013), 184. Nietzsche uses the term "metaphysical solace" to describe the symbolic ground from which one may affirm life despite its meaninglessness.

<sup>201</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, 8. Cf. Ibid., 33: "only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally justified". Nietzsche uses the term "metaphysics" only metaphorically, in order to describe an alternative view of the world (Daniels, *Nietzsche and the Birth of Tragedy*, 171, 84.): The metaphysical solace is a "metaphorical expression of that original relationship between thing-in-itself and phenomenon" (ibid., 184.; Cf. *The Birth of Tragedy*, 41-42. Nietzsche is not distancing himself from practical affairs as if to vouch for an aesthetic concept of art for art's sake. Rather, he aims at making his statement of utmost practical significance, because he believes that the aesthetic pleasure derived from our own creativity ultimately justifies life (Nussbaum, "The Transfigurations of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus," 59.).

saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live".<sup>202</sup>

The Greeks achieve this by the presentation of the Dionysian which expresses the excesses of life full of "contradiction, bliss born of pain".<sup>203</sup> However, Nietzsche notes that the Dionysian itself lacks logical form and so must be expressed in the Apollonian veil of "rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and knowledge".<sup>204</sup> That is, the Apollonian allows the representation of the otherwise unrepresentable.<sup>205</sup> Nietzsche suggests that this is most poignantly exemplified in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. In the chorus of their tragedies, the sublime Dionysian movements are presented through the measured beauty of Apollonian forms.<sup>206</sup> When the Dionysian breaks forth the Apollonian is "submerged".<sup>207</sup> In other words, the Apollonian serves to present the tragedy as art, but it is only when the Dionysian is released that the truly tragic element

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<sup>202</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7 (p.40), quoted in Nussbaum, 61.

<sup>203</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 27. Nietzsche expresses that Apollo returns to express itself "in more rigid and menacing forms than ever before, for the only explanation I can find for the Doric state and the Doric art is that it was a permanent military encampment of the Apolline..." (ibid., 28.), and yet it is clear that for Nietzsche the predominant influence is Dionysian, such that the Apolline is ultimately subdued by the Dionysian, and this is what gives tragedy its vital force.

<sup>204</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, 370.

<sup>205</sup> Nussbaum, "The Transfigurations of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus," 58-59. The representation of the Dionysian in Apollonian forms is the responsibility of the arts, which act as a guide to the aesthetic life.

<sup>206</sup> Julian Young, "Richard Wagner and the Birth of the Birth of Tragedy1," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no. 2 (2008): 239. Nietzschean scholar, Julian Young says, "In terms of the capacities of the human mind, the Dionysian is that which transcends concepts, that which cannot properly be articulated in language. And in aesthetic terms it is music, more exactly 'dithyrambic' music, music which, like Wagner's, dissolves everything into a 'sea of feeling'. In Wagner's choice of terminology, it is music that is 'sublime' rather than 'beautiful'".

<sup>207</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, 27.

comes to the fore.<sup>208</sup> Dionysus, suffering at the hands of fate, is revealed as the “real stage hero and centre of the vision,” and the spectator is confronted with a vision of a hero in agony, inspiring him to affirm life in an arbitrary world, which, though without meaning, is certainly not without the joy and beauty of the arts.<sup>209</sup>

It is clear, then, that Nietzsche wishes to affirm life through the joy of Dionysian ecstasies and not by the Apollonian forms. The highest function of the Apollonian is to help man affirm the chaotic ugliness and unrelenting suffering in the Dionysian. The beautiful form of Apollo is merely a pretence to the world of becoming that underlies reality.

### 3.1.2 Ratzinger’s Response to Nietzsche and the Dionysian

Ratzinger counters Nietzsche’s enthusiasm for the Dionysian by saying that the Dionysian music now heard in contemporary parties and festivals typify the forms of “anti-culture”, orientated towards “the pleasure of destruction, the abolition of everyday barriers, and the illusion of liberation from the ego in the wild ecstasy of noise and masses”.<sup>210</sup> Ratzinger identifies rock music in particular as the re-emergence of the Dionysian element stemming from African pagan music.<sup>211</sup> He suggests that this music intends to immerse the listener in sensual intoxication and leaves the spirit dull and anaesthetised.<sup>212</sup> In the Dionysian experience, “Man frees himself ... from the burden of consciousness. Music becomes ecstasy,

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<sup>208</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 75. Lubac says that in the tragedy, Dionysus “...in the last analysis, always remains the one and only character in it”.

<sup>209</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §8, quoted in Nussbaum, “The Transfigurations of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus,” 62.

<sup>210</sup> “Liturgy and Sacred Music,” 387.

<sup>211</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 119.

<sup>212</sup> *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2000), 150; *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, 119.



liberation from the ego, and unification with the universe”.<sup>213</sup> Ratzinger explains that the Dionysian represents “the deceptive beauty that makes the human being seem diminished instead of making him great, and for this reason is false”.<sup>214</sup>

This criticism of the Dionysian is founded on something deeper than subjective dislike of rock music. Ratzinger’s claim is that Dionysian music hinders the transcendent experience because its nature reflects a metaphysical distortion, a false perspective of reality that favours ugliness over beauty.<sup>215</sup> This distortion is connected to a false sense of *eros*; one which “crushes rationality” and “subjects the spirit to the senses”.<sup>216</sup>

Ratzinger charges the Greeks of practicing this “dehumanizing” and “counterfeit” form of *eros* in their custom of exploiting prostitutes in the temple for the kindling of “divine madness”.<sup>217</sup> Nietzsche subscribes to this understanding of *eros*, seeing in it a possessive sexual desire that denigrates the spiritual.<sup>218</sup> Ratzinger then explains that true *eros* is one that does not simply seek earthly pleasures, but an *eros* that “tends to rise ‘in ecstasy’ towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing”.<sup>219</sup> This is a passion that is “disciplined and purified”, so that it can have the potential to “provide not just fleeting pleasure, but a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns”.<sup>220</sup>

The true *eros* is enkindled by a form in conformity with *logos*, that is, profoundly ordered to reason. Ratzinger explains that such a form promotes the simultaneous

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<sup>213</sup> "Liturgy and Sacred Music," 387.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 387-88: Dionysian music is to be rejected “Not for aesthetic reasons, not for reactionary obstinacy, not from historical immobility, but because of its very nature”.

<sup>216</sup> *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 150.

<sup>217</sup> Benedict XVI, "Deus Caritas Est," §4.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, §14, p.89.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., §5.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., §4.

“spiritualization of the flesh” and the “corporealization into the body” and is able to overcome the “warped and destructive form of [*eros*]”.<sup>221</sup> By allowing the intimate union of soul and body, a form in accordance with reason prepares man for the ascending love of *eros*. This is appropriate because, “it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves”.<sup>222</sup> Rather, as Ratzinger explains, “...it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love —*eros*— able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur”.<sup>223</sup>

Ratzinger asks, “Does [music] integrate man by drawing him to what is above, or does it cause his disintegration into formless intoxication or mere sensuality?”<sup>224</sup> When one hears the music of *logos*, the senses are not abandoned but drawn into the wholeness of his being and thus reaches a spiritual dimension. As both spirit and sense enrich each other, it becomes “an expression of man's special place in the general structure of being”.<sup>225</sup> This is what makes rational music beautiful, because it brings together the flesh and spirit. It behaves as a catalyst for bringing about a unification of man’s being, ultimately drawing his whole being up to the transcendent. Whereas Dionysian revelry works against one’s unity of soul and body by reducing him to chaotic revelry, the music of *logos* “permits joy... a higher kind of ecstasy which does not extinguish the person but unites and thus liberates him”.<sup>226</sup>

It may be argued that Ratzinger is chiefly concerned with identifying what is suitable for liturgical music and that as a result his comments do not pertain to aesthetics as such. It is true that Ratzinger calls for the exclusion of rock music from the Church’s liturgy, but as already mentioned, this is not out of subjective

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.; Ratzinger, "Liturgy and Sacred Music," 386-87.

<sup>222</sup> Benedict XVI, "Deus Caritas Est". §5.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 151; Cf. *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 245.: “Man is ‘authentic’, is himself, precisely in the body; being human means ‘being in the body’; corporeality is the authenticity of man...”.

<sup>225</sup> *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 150.

<sup>226</sup> "Liturgy and Sacred Music," 389.

whim, but precisely based on the consideration of aesthetics, that is, the music's underlying metaphysical character.<sup>227</sup> In other words, Ratzinger gives liturgical music metaphysical justification; identifying in it a metaphysical aesthetic theory where the objective reality of beauty is presented as a transcendental on par with truth and goodness.

This also means that Ratzinger rejects Schopenhauer's proposition that music, as pure will, is anterior to reason.<sup>228</sup> Ratzinger sides with Guardini in claiming that precedence clearly lies in truth, that is, *logos*, and *not* in the will, which represents *ethos*.<sup>229</sup> Of course, art forms other than music are also capable of reflecting this priority of *logos* over *ethos*. Indeed, the reasoned beauty that reflects the truth of reality is also perceptible in architecture, visual arts and in literature.<sup>230</sup> Ratzinger explains that *logos*, the truth of being, is the standard by which art reflects the relationship of cosmic laws and so becomes a channel for man to achieve harmony in his own being. On the other hand, anarchistic theories of art where the subject takes precedence leaves man direly in want of this unison. Accordingly, for artwork to be beautiful it must be created in agreement with *logos*.<sup>231</sup>

For Ratzinger, the role of beauty in art is to express the mystery of God, but in doing so it also expresses the mystery of man.<sup>232</sup> This is because man, as reason and heart, finds his personhood and being in *logos*. In other words, man is not defined primarily by his *pragma*, his works, but rather, by his being, his personhood, received from another in history and in God.<sup>233</sup> Ratzinger says that,

Christian art is a rational art - let us think of Gothic art or of the great music or even, precisely, of our own Baroque art - but it is the artistic

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 387. An element of the liturgy is to make transcendent beauty palpable so that one can rise to the contemplation of God as in anamnesis.

<sup>228</sup> *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 154-55. Cf. Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 355.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 155. Cf. Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937), 145-51.

<sup>230</sup> Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 156.

<sup>231</sup> Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Artists in the Sistine Chapel."

<sup>232</sup> "Meeting with Artists in the Sistine Chapel."

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 380.

expression of a greatly expanded reason, in which heart and reason encounter each other.<sup>234</sup>

Now, if *logos* is what gives art its beauty, then an ordered Apollonian beauty divorced from truth cannot be truly beautiful. The kind of beauty that only appeals to a surface pleasure or base motives actually degrades the ideal of beauty by divorcing it from truth and love:

A beauty that is deceptive and false, a dazzling beauty that does not bring human beings out of themselves to open them to the ecstasy of rising to the heights, but indeed locks them entirely into themselves. Such beauty does not reawaken a longing for the Ineffable, readiness for sacrifice, the abandonment of self, but instead stirs up the desire, the will for power, possession and pleasure.<sup>235</sup>

For Ratzinger, the reality of transcendental beauty must be separated from the breathtaking effect of counterfeit beauty. The latter is represented in advertisements created with the aim of deceiving man by appealing to his senses. These false forms of beauty are almost irresistible, making the observer “want to grab everything and seek the passing satisfaction rather than be open to others”.<sup>236</sup>

This critique of aestheticism seems to follow the thoughts of Dostoevsky, who is often mentioned in Ratzinger’s comments on beauty.<sup>237</sup> According to Dostoevsky, even the devout man finds it difficult to separate himself from the intensity of sensuous beauty. He calls it the “mysterious as well as terrible” power of the “beauty of Sodom” which is able to deceive and tempt the “immense mass of

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<sup>234</sup> Benedict XVI, "Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone".

<sup>235</sup> "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty," §20.

<sup>236</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §22.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, "Deus Caritas Est". §16; Pope Francis, "Lumen Fidei," Encyclical, (2013); Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty," §22. Note, despite the official author being Pope Francis, the encyclical “Lumen Fidei” was co-written by Joseph Ratzinger (Cf. Gerhard L. Müller, "Presentation of the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis Lumen Fidei," (2013).

mankind”.<sup>238</sup> He therefore says that, “God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man”.<sup>239</sup> Dostoevsky does not give a simple explanation for the power of selfish and sensual beauty; it remains a mystery. Yet nor does he brush the problem aside. He says that it is the “ideal of the Madonna”, the beauty that is both sorrowful in sin and yet rejoicing in hope, which is the true standard towards which man strives in the ongoing battle against self-gratification.<sup>240</sup>

Ratzinger notes that today’s culture is “not always propitious for accepting a beauty in full harmony with truth and goodness”, and yet he is greatly hopeful for the ultimate triumph of transcendental beauty. This is because Ratzinger recognises that man will always be “desirous of, and nostalgic for, a genuine beauty that is neither superficial nor ephemeral”.<sup>241</sup> In the next section we shall consider whether this is a hope worth holding onto in the face of all the ugliness in the world and in its history.

## **3.2 Theodor Adorno**

### **3.2.1 Ugliness and Pessimism**

Nietzsche clearly rejects the transcendental notion of beauty, and yet he remains sensitive to the significance of the aesthetic experience. In his critique on modern music, Nietzsche explains that both popular music and what he calls “advanced music” transcend the classical favouring of beauty over ugliness. Here, whereas popular music returns to the sensuality of the primitive and Dionysian cults, advanced music takes on ugly forms with the aim of achieving symbolic

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<sup>238</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers* (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2007), 114.

<sup>239</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*, 114.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

meaning.<sup>242</sup> This means that, for Nietzsche, the experience of the ugly confers more meaning than the beautiful.<sup>243</sup>

Like Nietzsche, Adorno proposes a theory of art where ugliness has priority over beauty. A major difference, however, is that Adorno pays little attention to the Greek myth of Dionysus. Rather, he stresses that the ugly in art is associated with the moral realm and manifests man's socio-political history. In particular, he points to the moral atrocities of World War II as a burden too heavy for humanity to express its history adequately through art. The sheer degree and extent of suffering caused by fellow man in the Holocaust exceeds any attempt to give it expression, such that one is no longer even capable of writing poetry without being barbaric.<sup>244</sup>

Furthermore, Adorno believes it is unjust for one to express joy after the Holocaust, and for the same reason, art can no longer be made beautiful. Adorno proscribes any kind of "cheerful art" and the forms of poetry that glorify suffering, as they constitute an "injustice to the dead; to accumulated, speechless pain".<sup>245</sup>

On the other hand, Adorno does not desire the ultimate demise of art in general. Far from censoring art, Adorno wishes that art be considered even more important for its radical connection with human suffering. Art maintains this connection when it destroys illusions of harmony and becomes a form of social criticism. However, this is only possible with ugly art. In fact, Adorno claims that man's historical condition demands that art be ugly.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Hohendahl, *The Fleeting Promise of Art Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited*, 99.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 77; Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London; New York: Continuum, 2002), 40.

<sup>246</sup> Berthold Hoeckner, *Apparitions: New Perspectives on Adorno and Twentieth Century Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), viii-ix. Adorno explains that the critical function of art lies in its ability to communicate something beyond rational concepts. This is the expression of the artwork's truth-content. The truth-content is not an idea, and in no way legitimizes a search for meaning in the artwork. Adorno is speaking about an understanding of truth which does not infer the notion of meaning and yet is immanently perceived in the aesthetic experience. Art ultimately

Ugly art criticises man's socio-political history by conveying a truth that is *not* rational, that is, it opposes the kind of post-enlightenment rationalistic thinking which justifies the kind of progress exemplified by the atom-bomb.<sup>247</sup> Adorno provides a metaphysical grounding for the ugly, suggesting that the ugly, rather than beauty, is able to express history truthfully because ugliness is the primal reality of which beauty is a negation.<sup>248</sup> In other words, true aesthetic experience is of the ugly and not of the beautiful.

In opposition to Plato, Adorno describes the aesthetic experience as “shocks of incomprehension” that “illuminate the meaningless world”.<sup>249</sup> For Adorno, the Platonic transcendence experienced in the shock of beauty is but an illusion which entraps man to self-repression. Adorno's existential negativity is perhaps best expressed in the lines:

Even the blossoming tree lies the moment its bloom is seen without the shadow of terror; even the innocent “How lovely!” becomes an excuse for an existence outrageously unlovely, and there is no longer beauty or consolation except in the gaze falling on horror, withstanding it, and in unalleviated consciousness of negativity holding fast to the possibility of what is better.<sup>250</sup>

One can see that Adorno's overwhelming disappointment in history is reflected in the deep pessimism of his aesthetics. According to Adorno, the classical tonality

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remains enigmatic and because we cannot comprehend it in full, we must accept that it is unable to reconcile man with nature, nor resolve man's intellectual desire for philosophical certitude (Hohendahl, *The Fleeting Promise of Art Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited*, 66-73).

<sup>247</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom Lectures 1964-1965* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014), 12; Cf. Benedict XVI, "Spe Salvi," Encyclical, (2007).

<sup>248</sup> Hohendahl, *The Fleeting Promise of Art Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited*, 94.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. Referring to Adorno, *Modern Music*, 133; Second quote from Adorno, *Modern Music*, 142-143, quoted in David Roberts, *Art and Enlightenment: Aesthetic Theory after Adorno* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 103.

<sup>250</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London; New York: Verso, 1978), §5, p.25. Cf. Alexander Kissler, *Der Deutsche Papst : Benedikt XVI. Und Seine Schwierige Heimat* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 178.

of Mozart and Beethoven create the illusion of assurance regarding a transcendent world. This type of music effectively lies to man by reconfirming the status quo. This explains Adorno's admiration for Schoenberg's twelve-tone-technique, which "moves emphatically towards the dissolution of art" by the expression of "lonely subjectivity which withdraws into itself".<sup>251</sup> According to Adorno, Schoenberg's atonal compositions represent the end of music in the sense that it reaches its *telos* of self-negation. That is, Schoenberg's music liberates music from its very self so that it simply represents the "dissociation of meaning and expression".<sup>252</sup>

The self-negation of Schoenberg's music also allows man to recognize the possibility of his own emancipation from repressive self-identity.<sup>253</sup> Here, Adorno's pessimism is redoubled considering that even this desired liberation is only a possibility and no certitude. This exemplifies the potential for ugly art to signify pessimistic implosion and metaphysical emptiness.

### 3.2.2 Ugliness According to Ratzinger

In response to Adorno's negative critique on transcendent beauty, Ratzinger also asks "Whether beauty is true, or whether it is not ugliness that leads to the deepest reality", and "Can the beautiful be genuine, or, in the end, is it only an illusion? Isn't reality perhaps basically evil?"<sup>254</sup> Ratzinger treats Adorno's critique seriously because he accepts the existence of a real relationship between morality and aesthetics. He makes this acknowledgement especially clear when he says,

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<sup>251</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1982), 170, quoted in Moustafa Bayoumi, "Reconciliation without Duress: Said, Adorno, and the Autonomous Intellectual," *alifjcomppoet Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 25 (2005): 52f.

<sup>252</sup> Quoted by Roberts, *Art and Enlightenment: Aesthetic Theory after Adorno*, 51.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §18.



The fear that in the end it is not the arrow of the beautiful that leads us to the truth, but that falsehood, all that is ugly and vulgar, may constitute the true "reality" has at all times caused people anguish. At present this has been expressed in the assertion that after Auschwitz it was no longer possible to write poetry...<sup>255</sup>

Ratzinger, like Adorno, accepts that the classical notion of beauty in Apollonian forms is not enough to deal with the history of human suffering exemplified so brutally in the Holocaust. Ratzinger says,

This objection, which seemed reasonable enough before Auschwitz when one realized all the atrocities of history, shows that in any case a purely harmonious concept of beauty is not enough. It cannot stand up to the confrontation with the gravity of the questioning about God, truth and beauty. Apollo, who for Plato's Socrates was "the God" and the guarantor of unruffled beauty as "the truly divine" is absolutely no longer sufficient.

We have now come to a crucial point in the thesis, where we must now consider, in some depth, Ratzinger's theological perspective on the person of Jesus and the implications of revelation on the meaning of beauty. This will highlight again Ratzinger's integration of philosophy and theology in a special relationship with each other, for it is precisely in their interrelation that he is able to offer a solution to the aesthetic problem at hand.

A central theme in Ratzinger's reflection on beauty is founded on Augustine's description of a certain paradox that occurs in the scriptures.<sup>256</sup> That is, the Psalms speak of Jesus as, "the fairest of the children of men and grace is poured upon your lips" (Psalm 44), and yet the book of Isaiah tells us that Jesus "had no beauty,

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid. It is worth noting that Ratzinger refers to Adorno a number of times, including in his encyclical on Christian hope (*Spe Salvi*) when discussing religious images and the reconciliation of historic suffering, and Ratzinger also discusses questions of religion and society with Jürgen Habermas, a philosopher and student of Adorno (*The Dialectics of Secularisation*). Importantly, Ratzinger alludes to him when speaking on beauty ("The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty", §18).

<sup>256</sup> "Wounded by the Arrow of Beauty: The Cross and the New 'Aesthetics' of Faith," 33.

no majesty to draw our eyes, no grace to make us delight in him" (Isaiah 53).<sup>257</sup> These two passages describe the same person in the same event, namely, Jesus on the cross. The event of the cross involves a gruesome and ugly sight of a man with "no beauty, no majesty to draw our eyes", but Christianity claims that this man is also God, the Supreme Beauty.<sup>258</sup> Somehow the beautiful one is seen to have no beauty at all. The ugliness of death is not ignored, but overcome. Ratzinger interprets this as a paradox where a new understanding of beauty is to be "debated anew and suffered".<sup>259</sup>

This paradox of beauty is unheard of in ancient Greek philosophy, and is described by Augustine as a "beauty in righteousness", a "beauty which seeks the eye of the heart".<sup>260</sup> Since Jesus is "altogether just", he is "altogether beautiful".<sup>261</sup> Reflecting on this, Ratzinger says,

...this beauty is not simply a harmony of proportion and form; "the fairest of the sons of men" is also, mysteriously, the one "who had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him". Jesus Christ shows us how the truth of love can transform even the dark mystery of death into the radiant light of the resurrection. Here the splendour of God's glory surpasses all worldly beauty. The truest beauty is the love of God, who definitively revealed himself to us in the paschal mystery.<sup>262</sup>

The transcendental metaphysics of the philosophers is limited by its indifference to suffering and death, but the Beauty of Jesus transforms the ugliness of suffering and death by his love. Ratzinger reiterates this paradox as an answer to Adorno's critique. Indeed, the ugliness of death, with all its shadows,

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<sup>257</sup> Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, 191.

<sup>258</sup> Nichols, "Redeeming Beauty Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics" 57.

<sup>259</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §4.

<sup>260</sup> Augustine explains that by Christ's condescension to the form of a servant unto death he reveals that "The highest and truest beauty is that of righteousness" quoted in Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, 237.

<sup>261</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Sacramentum Caritatis," Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, (2007).

paradoxically points to the fact that nothing less than the brightness of love is able to overcome it.

At the same time, Ratzinger recognizes that Adorno's criticism of beautiful art has an element of moral concern for fellow man. As Ratzinger illustrates,

When someone rejoices, he is afraid of offending against solidarity with the many people who suffer. I don't have any right to rejoice, people think, in a world where there is so much misery, so much injustice.<sup>263</sup>

However, Ratzinger asserts that this apparently well-intentioned attitude of denying joy for the sake of solidarity is simply "wrong" because in the end suffering is not the last word, but rather beauty and truth.<sup>264</sup> A beauty which is the splendour of truth is a beauty that is love, a beauty that can be trusted. The love of God portrayed on the cross is the beauty that can give us hope and liberate us from the temptations of nihilism, and from which derives true freedom to love others.<sup>265</sup> Ratzinger explains the situation this way:

... in his Face that is so disfigured, there appears the genuine, extreme beauty: the beauty of love that goes "*to the very end*"; for this reason it is revealed as greater than falsehood and violence. Whoever has perceived this beauty knows that truth, and not falsehood, is the real aspiration of the world. It is not the false that is "true", but indeed, the Truth.<sup>266</sup>

Christ's love for man expressed in total sacrifice reveals the truth about beauty, and the beauty of truth. The truth concerning beauty *as* truth is manifest precisely in an event of suffering and despair, and we are unable to accept this truth without amending our own attitude towards suffering. The only way to see this, the

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<sup>263</sup> Benedict XVI and Peter Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 36. Cf. Kissler, *Der Deutsche Papst: Benedikt XVI. Und Seine Schwierige Heimat*, 176.

<sup>264</sup> Benedict XVI and Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium*, 36.

<sup>265</sup> Benedict XVI, "Spe Salvi," §36.

<sup>266</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty," §19.

only way to hold on to human solidarity with all its misery and yet truly rejoice, is to “obtain the resources to go on only from God”.<sup>267</sup> Ratzinger therefore declares,

Whoever believes in God, in the God who manifested himself, precisely in the altered appearance of Christ crucified as love "to the end" (John 13:1), knows that beauty is truth and truth beauty; but in the suffering Christ he also learns that the beauty of truth also embraces offence, pain, and even the dark mystery of death, and that this can only be found in accepting suffering, not in ignoring it.<sup>268</sup>

This attitude can only come about by a transformation of the heart and not simply of the logical mind. Ratzinger explains that the reason for this is that a clever and logical answer to suffering never suffices: “No, the question can only be endured, suffered through—with him and at the side of him who suffered it to the end for all of us and with all of us”.<sup>269</sup>

Ratzinger explains that “The Christian does not gloss over or deny the deep shadows that fall upon man’s existence in this world”.<sup>270</sup> In fact, according to Ratzinger, it is only those who accept their sufferings who can have a paradoxical joy in knowing that beauty is truth and that evil and suffering are *not* the fundamental realities of the world.<sup>271</sup> He asserts that this joy,

...reaches the roots of our existence and proves its strength not least in the fact that it sustains us when all else about us is darkness. Christian joy is

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<sup>267</sup> Benedict XVI and Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millennium*, 37.

<sup>268</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty," §5.

<sup>269</sup> *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 288.

<sup>270</sup> Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 254.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.* Here, Ratzinger uses the following imagery: “And yet these very shadows are also signs of hope for him, because he believes and, in believing, knows that they are shadows, which would not be there without the great light that casts them. And if the present belongs to the shadows, then the future is that much more in the possession of the light”.

intended precisely also for those who labour and are heavy-burdened; those who have no reason to laugh here...<sup>272</sup>

Ratzinger further notes that, “In this world of suffering, adoration has continued to rise up from the fiery furnaces of the crematories and not from the spectators of the horror”.<sup>273</sup> On the other hand, the comfortable onlooker is prone to becoming guilty and embittered by the suffering of others. The suffering of others becomes overbearing when contrasted with the comforts of one’s own life so one can develop a distrust of a God who is both good and beautiful.<sup>274</sup> Ratzinger therefore appeals to the reason of the heart, that in the midst of difficulties, one may find hope by the prayerful identification with the suffering figure on the cross. Faith plays a key part here because it is according to the faith that Jesus, who suffered thus, also rose from the dead and through his death reconciled the world to God. It is on account of this belief in the resurrection after death that the faithful can dare to proclaim that “love is stronger than death”, and so hold with certainty that beauty overcomes ugliness.<sup>275</sup> Ratzinger further expounds:

[It] is the true transformation which the world needs and which alone can redeem the world. Since Christ, in an act of love has transformed and defeated violence from within, death itself is transformed: love is stronger than death. It remains forever.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 81-82.

<sup>273</sup> *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 289. Ratzinger continues, “It is no accident that the people who in their history have been the most condemned to suffering, the people who have been the worst battered and the most wretched and who did not have to wait for 1940 – 1945 to be in ‘Auschwitz’ also became the people of revelation, the people who have known God and made him visible to the world.”

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.* Paradoxically, it is the “onlookers at the terror” - those who do not suffer themselves and yet never stop looking upon the suffering of the world “from the cushioned armchair of their own prosperity” who gasp and cry out “there is no God!”

<sup>275</sup> “Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity,” Lecture at the bishops' conference of the region of Campania in Benevento, (2002).

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

The passionate and sacrificial love of God gives man the necessary hope to affirm the ultimate truth of beauty and love in the midst of suffering. Indeed, it is in this regard that Ratzinger accords with Dostoevsky's famous words of hope, "Beauty will save the world".<sup>277</sup> As mentioned, Dostoevsky is for Ratzinger a source of philosophical and theological thinking, especially in regard to the implications of beauty experienced in the heart.<sup>278</sup> In Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin says to Rogozhin, "The essence of religious feeling does not depend on reason, and it has nothing to do with wrongdoing or crime or with atheism. There is something else there and there always will be, and atheists will always pass over it and will never be talking about that".<sup>279</sup> In the paradox of beauty – the death of Jesus depicts the beauty of love as truth, but this paradox is insurmountable by positivistic limitations on reason or the denial of love by a false preference for the violent and ugly. Ratzinger, along with Pope Francis, surmises:

... it is precisely in contemplating Jesus' death that faith grows stronger and receives a dazzling light; then it is revealed as faith in Christ's

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<sup>277</sup> This is expressed in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* when Hyppolyte makes an observation concerning the painting, "The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb", by Hans Holbein the Younger. Hyppolyte says: "It is strange to look on this dreadful picture of the mangled corpse of the Saviour, and to put this question to oneself: "Supposing that the disciples, the future apostles, the women who had followed Him and stood by the cross, all of whom believed in and worshiped Him -- supposing that they saw this tortured body, this face so mangled and bleeding and bruised (and they must have so seen it) -- how could they have gazed upon the dreadful sight and yet have believed that He would rise again?" (Translation by Eva Martin, Part III, Ch. 6). This reaction from Hyppolyte may be a clue to the experience of Dostoevsky himself when contemplating the suffering and death of Christ in the same painting. We know from the account of Dostoevsky's wife that when they went to see the painting together, Dostoevsky was so overcome by the painting that he had to sit down and she became worried for him in case it might bring on a seizure – Predrag Cicovacki, *Dostoevsky and the Affirmation of Life* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012).

<sup>278</sup> "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty," §22.

<sup>279</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Henry Carlisle and Olga Andreyev Carlisle (New York; London: Signet Classics, 1978), 241; Cf. Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 302.

steadfast love for us, a love capable of embracing death to bring us salvation.<sup>280</sup>

This understanding of beauty can only be supported by faith and personal suffering. These are related because suffering purifies the heart and allows one to understand better the love shown in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Ratzinger expresses that this realisation is the fundamental kernel of joy in life, and stands in contradistinction to Nietzsche's distaste for Christian sacrifice. He says,

The Cross, which was for Nietzsche the most detestable expression of the negative character of the Christian religion, is in truth the centre of the evangelium, the glad tidings: "It is good that you exist" – no, "It is necessary that you exist." The Cross is the approbation of our existence, not in words, but in an act so completely radical that it caused God to become flesh and pierced this flesh to the quick; that, to God, it was worth the death of his incarnate Son. One who is so loved that the other identifies his life with this love and no longer desires to live if he is deprived of it; one who is loved even unto death— such a one knows that he is truly loved. But if God so loves us, then we are loved in truth. Then love is truth, and truth is love. Then life is worth living.<sup>281</sup>

Whereas Nietzsche points to *eros* as the primary form of love, Christian joy is founded on a love that is both *eros* and *agape*. Ratzinger formulates this precise relationship of hope with beauty, recalling Pope Paul VI's words to artists at the close of the Second Vatican Council,

This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart, and is that precious fruit which resists the erosion of time, which unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Pope Francis, "Lumen Fidei," §16. This encyclical was co-written by Joseph Ratzinger - Cf. Gerhard L. Müller, "Presentation of the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis Lumen Fidei," (2013).

<sup>281</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 81.

<sup>282</sup> Quoted in Benedict XVI, "Meeting with Artists in the Sistine Chapel."

Meanwhile, the cult of the ugly opposes joy as if it was only fit for the foolish and the gullible. Adorno suggests that the idea of eternal joy is a crude joke when we face the overwhelming evils of suffering in human history.<sup>283</sup> Ratzinger's presentation of beauty as relating to the salvation of the world is not simply intended to subdue cynicism and pessimism, but stands for something positive, something absolutely real and tangible. Beauty reveals that joy is possible, not by ignoring death but by overcoming it by love, and this is why we can have hope in suffering.

### 3.2.3 A New Understanding of Being

By these reflections, Ratzinger suggests that the Ancient Greek understanding of beauty is inadequate precisely on account of their limited theological scope. The unchangeable, transcendent and perfect form of beauty is for the Greeks based on the unchangeable, transcendent and perfect God of being in combination with the refined mythical form of Apollo. According to Ratzinger, the Ancient Greek understanding of God as being is helpful and necessary to understand the Christian God, who is indeed Being, Truth, Goodness and Beauty. As discussed earlier, the knowledge of being bestowed by the encounter with beauty is already purported by Plato to be synonymous with a kind of love.<sup>284</sup> However, these metaphysical principles fall short of depicting the God who is also person.

Christian theology, by engaging with Ancient Greek metaphysics, reveals that the transcendent being that irrupts in the splendour of the form, is not an impersonal reality, but an encounter with the person of Jesus himself "who has smitten them with this longing. It is he who has sent a ray of his beauty into their eyes".<sup>285</sup> In this way, Ratzinger ties the philosophical account of transcendental convertibility with the perception and knowledge of a paradoxical beauty of love in the person of Jesus.

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<sup>283</sup> Gaál, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift*, 152-53.

<sup>284</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §7.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. Ratzinger quotes from Nicholas Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, II, 15.



Christianity gives a new perspective on beauty. This is the beauty of Jesus, the beauty of love which radiates truth and goodness. According to Ratzinger, this is possible because God is both love and *logos*: “The God of faith, as thought, is also love”.<sup>286</sup> He continues, “the creative original thought, is at the same time love”, such that “truth and love are originally identical; that where they are completely realized they are not two parallel or even opposing realities but one, the one and only absolute”.<sup>287</sup> In other words, God is love precisely as he is reason. As such, the Christian understanding of reason culminates in the divine person of Jesus: “The world comes from reason and this reason is a Person, is Love”.<sup>288</sup> Being, truth and *logos*, each of these then is also convertible with love.

If the same love represents the desire and love for the truth, then this must have implications for the way we understand the acquisition of knowledge. This confirms Augustine’s notion that when one loves something he “seeks for its face”.<sup>289</sup> Ratzinger develops on this by explaining that “to love means wishing to know”, and that this drive is integral to accepting the truth.<sup>290</sup> In order to attain true knowledge, we must first love the truth and seek it with all our heart, which implies the need for sacrifice, as Ratzinger explains:

Only by understanding do I receive reality at all; and understanding, in turn, depends on a certain measure of inner identification with what is to be understood. It depends on love. I cannot really understand something for which I have no love whatsoever. So the transmission of the message needs more than the kind of memory that stores telephone numbers: what

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<sup>286</sup> Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 148.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>289</sup> Ratzinger, "Faith, Philosophy and Theology," 361.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.* The extended quote reads: “To love means wishing to know, and so the search for insight can be an inner drive towards love. To put it another way, there is a link between love and truth, which is significant for both philosophy and theology ... Christian faith can say of itself: I have found love. But the love for Christ and for one’s neighbour for the sake of Christ can only have stability when it is, at base, love of the truth”.

is requires is a memory of the heart, in which I invest something of myself.<sup>291</sup>

For Ratzinger, the greatest knowledge concerns the question, “how can God enter into the human spirit?”, and it is in approaching this knowledge, whether “from the concept of God or from the nature of man,” which “leads us to the most profound depth of our understanding of reality per se”.<sup>292</sup> It is only by loving, then, that we can have insight into the nature of beauty as love and truth in the person of Jesus. He is both the beauty of *eros* which is manifest in his yearning love to redeem mankind, and also the beauty of *agape*, as the person who loves to the very end. Jesus loves by embracing suffering and so reveals what is truly beautiful and human. One accepts the same beauty conferred in the loving act of Jesus by emulating his love, both in *eros* and *agape*. That is, by a life of love and sacrifice. Beauty, then, calls out to all to respond to this love by exercising their freedom for the good, and in this way, it offers to make man beautiful and whole. For Ratzinger, the saint becomes the epitome of ugliness to the world in his self-renunciation, but by precisely the same act of love he becomes eminently beautiful as he reflects the true beauty of God.<sup>293</sup>

### 3.2.4 Being-from and Being-for

Beauty is convertible with being and yet beauty is also person. This is founded on Ratzinger’s understanding of being as relation. Ratzinger explains that the Christian God remains “the highest possibility of Being”, and this “highest mode of Being includes the element of relationship”.<sup>294</sup> Ratzinger continues, “Being no longer appears as absolute, enclosed autarchy but turns out to be at the same time

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<sup>291</sup> *Seek That Which Is Above : Meditations through the Year* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 101.

<sup>292</sup> *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 343.

<sup>293</sup> "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §21.

<sup>294</sup> Benedict XVI, *Introduction to Christianity*, 148. Cf. pp. 129-130.

involvement, creative power, which creates and bears and loves other things...”<sup>295</sup>  
This points to the distinction between what is conceived as *Being of the ancient philosophers* and *God as Being* in Christian thought. Ratzinger asks,

Is the God who names himself and has a name, the God who helps and is always there, radically different from the *esse subsistens*, the absolute Being, that is discovered in the lonely silence of philosophical speculation, or what?<sup>296</sup>

This is elucidated in Ratzinger’s analysis of the nature of persons. He writes,

“Person” in God is the pure relativity of being turned toward each other; it is situated, not on the level of substance – the substance is *one-* but rather on the level of dialogue, of being related to one another... the Christian faith gave birth to this idea of pure actuality, of pure relativity, which does *not* lie on the level of substance and does not affect or divide the substance per se, and thus brought the personal phenomenon plainly into view.<sup>297</sup>

Ratzinger further explains that the three Persons of the Trinity “are not substances alongside one another; rather, they are nothing other than actual, real relations”, such that “In God, person means relation. ... the Person exists by his very nature only as relation”.<sup>298</sup> Regarding this, Ratzinger refers to Richard of St Victor who points out that “person” is not in the realm of essence but rather “on the level of existence”.<sup>299</sup>

Ratzinger suggests that being as person is also “Being from and for someone”.<sup>300</sup> When this is applied to man, it explains “the unique structure of the soul, which can exist only in the manner of dialogue and freedom”. It gives a clue to how the

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>297</sup> Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 187.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 186. Here, Ratzinger is reflecting on Augustine’s understanding of the Trinity.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 282.

beauty of participation in being, convertible with truth and goodness, may also simultaneously be a beauty that is personal love.<sup>301</sup>

Ratzinger points out, however, that it is common to hear the false notion that man is a product of his own freedom, which stems from Sartre's concept of freedom as one of absolute self-determination.<sup>302</sup> It is a freedom loosed from any sense of boundary which is associated with the idea that praxis has potential to become progress.<sup>303</sup> Expressions of art with a radically inflated emphasis on subjectivism such as deconstructive or anarchistic art theories are often founded on this empty notion of freedom where, in fact, the subject himself is lost.<sup>304</sup>

The falsity of this claim can be established simply by considering the fact that man is not "free" to live longer than his nature allows. Man is mortal and this reality cannot be changed by self-determination. This problem will remain as long as freedom is equated with complete autonomy, which usually chooses to ignore this fact altogether since the depressing reality of death steers one from confronting it in thought thereby allowing one to fall into the comfort of perceived self-sufficiency, into his own "little immortality".<sup>305</sup> Death reveals that a person's existence is contingent on another, and this dependency reveals that relationship is the principle by which human beings exist as persons.

In presenting this idea of person, Ratzinger refers to the concept of the *I-Thou*, introduced by Ferdinand Ebner and developed on by Martin Buber. Buber's notion of the *I-Thou* stipulates that a person *is* only insofar as he is an *I* in communication with a *Thou*. More precisely, man discovers that his own being is made for relation when he experiences the God as *other* and subsequently recognizes that the capacity to know this *other* can only derive from self-

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 153. Ratzinger refers to Bonaventure's view that "a merely natural soul is inconceivable; an essential of the soul is that it cannot subsist in itself alone. It must be preserved by something that is greater than itself, by something 'supernatural'".

<sup>302</sup> "Truth and Freedom," 28-29.

<sup>303</sup> *A Turning Point for Europe?: The Church in the Modern World : Assessment and Forecast* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 95.

<sup>304</sup> *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 155-56.

<sup>305</sup> *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 99.

realisation. Accordingly, the first and fundamental relationship for man is with God, the eternal-Thou.<sup>306</sup> In line with this, Ratzinger suggests that it is when one realises himself in dialogue with God that he begins to know himself more completely, for “man himself is the place in which and through which he experiences God”.<sup>307</sup>

Moreover, Ratzinger reveals that being-as-relation has further consequences when it expresses the communal reality of God as Trinity and man as collective species. That is, between God and man, there is an element of plurality on both sides as God is not simply a person, but precisely *persons* (of the Trinity), and man is not only an individual but man in the community of the human race.<sup>308</sup> Therefore, man’s relationship with God is not exhausted by the *I-Thou* relationship alone, but must also encompass an element of *We-We*.<sup>309</sup> Finally, as man is to be understood as being in relation to the plurality of persons in the Trinity, not only from the perspective of the individual, but also in light of man as part of the human race, we can recognize our nature as being-from and being-for implies a relationship of communal love.

For Ratzinger, man is finite whether considered as individual or as species, however, the relationship that exists between the *We* of man and the *We* of God guarantees man’s dignity. Ratzinger says,

Of all creatures God loves man in a special way and confers upon him an extraordinary dignity, giving him that glory which the rebellious angels lost. The human race may thus be counted as the tenth choir of the angelic

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<sup>306</sup> *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 189. Reflecting on these thoughts of Buber, Ratzinger adds, “Perhaps that is even the real distinction between the human mind and other forms of consciousness found in animals: the fact that the human mind can think about the wholly other, the concept of God” (ibid.).

<sup>307</sup> *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 354.

<sup>308</sup> *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 195.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 195-96. Ratzinger suggests that the notion of the we-we relationship between God and man has largely been lost. Even an individualised aspect of relationship in the *I-Thou* barely remains since after Kant the *I-Thou* is absorbed into the single *I* of the “transcendental consciousness”. For Kant, beauty is deprived of its objectivity let alone its identity with love.

hierarchy. Indeed human beings are able to know God in himself, that is, his one nature in the Trinity of Persons.<sup>310</sup>

The relationship between the persons of the Trinity is that of love, and so it is this love that analogously defines the nature of the intrinsic relationship between man and fellow man. In other words, the truth of our being is first and foremost realised in our existence as persons who are loved and are made for loving. It is only in accordance with our nature as being-in-relation that we can respond to God's love with our own love for him and for others.

Ratzinger points out that of all the philosophers it is the atheist Ludwig Feuerbach who recognizes this *we* of man.<sup>311</sup> Individual man attains to his grandeur only insofar as he is communal man. However, Feuerbach goes further than identifying the finitude of individuality because he proposes the absoluteness of man as species, and in this claim to absoluteness through community Feuerbach deliberately excludes humanity's relationship with God.<sup>312</sup>

The significance of this for the understanding of beauty is that, for Feuerbach, beauty only amounts to a sign of man's love for himself as a species, whereas for Ratzinger, the role and effect of beauty is proportional to its capacity to facilitate for man the experience of the dialogical relationship with the *Thou* in the Trinitarian God. Furthermore, beauty also signifies plurality in unity since God exists as community of the Trinity, and man correspondingly finds himself in community as species.

Ultimately, for Ratzinger, both beauty and being converge in the relationship that is God as persons. Beauty is truth and love, and these are not concepts in a

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<sup>310</sup> Benedict XVI, "Proclaiming Saint Hildegard of Bingen, Professed Nun of the Order of Saint Benedict, a Doctor of the Universal Church," Apostolic Letter, (2012).

<sup>311</sup> Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, 196.

<sup>312</sup> Feuerbach says "Man's being is contained only in community, in the unity of man with man – a unity which rests, however, only on the reality of the difference between I and Thou", however he does not elaborate further on this term. Buber in turn confesses to have been influenced greatly by Feuerbach - Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Routledge & Paul, 1949), 182.

vacuum, but rather “have a face and a name. They issue a call to us. For they are ‘Love’, that is to say, a person”.<sup>313</sup> The potency of beauty is realized in the encounter with this person, the *eternal-Thou*, who is intuited as someone distinct from the *I*, but which then reveals the *I* in greater depth, that is, of man as being in communion with each other and with God. This is what moves one to the conviction of truth, a “*Conversio* (‘conversion’, *metanoia*)” to a more certain knowledge of reality.<sup>314</sup> The experience of beauty confers this valuable knowledge and so represents the surpassing of each individual’s search for the meaning of his own existence as being-in-relation, as being-from and being-for; loved and free to love.

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<sup>313</sup> Ratzinger, *Credo for Today: What Christians Believe*, 126.

<sup>314</sup> *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 355.

## Conclusion

Ratzinger observes that today beauty is often used and manipulated for power and gain.<sup>315</sup> Although the corruption of beauty and the atrocities of human history might seem to support the cynical view that considers beauty a wasteful deception and even recommends ugliness as the ultimate foundation of reality, Ratzinger's aesthetics is able to respond to these challenges. By combining both philosophical and theological insights as well as reflecting on his own experience of beauty, Ratzinger presents a renewed understanding of beauty that culminates in its identification with truth and love. Beauty is not simply a judgment of taste that changes according to whether the observer feels pleasure in it. It is a metaphysical reality that has precedence over man. Ratzinger wishes to express this truth about beauty, and even more, to build a religious and cultural environment where beauty is cherished as a way to communicate with God, the supreme Beauty.

An important point in his presentation of beauty is that beauty concerns not only *eros*, which is enkindled by the reasoned forms, but also *agape*. Plato explains that beauty is not simply external for he also believes that the beautiful forms of visible things participate in invisible beauty. In other words, it is through the external things, not as an end but as a means, that we fly unto the unchanging eternal Beauty. However, it is clear that when burdened by the ugliness of human weakness and the certainty of death, an understanding of beauty limited to its Apollonian appearance is unable to seed a hope proper to existence as contained in the Christian message. The external form of the cross reveals then an internal beauty.

Ratzinger explains, however, that this internal beauty is the same beauty manifest in the *logos*, which reveals itself in the mangled body of the crucifix. Beauty, in its primary sense then, is a person, Jesus Christ, who loves by both *eros* and *agape*. This beauty of love is the foundation of reality, which means that beauty reigns supreme and overshadows all the moral ugliness of history.

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<sup>315</sup> "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §20.



The passion of Christ makes this possible – and this is a point that is certainly given greater clarity in light of philosophical aesthetics. This points again to a theme so significant in Ratzinger’s works: the relationship between philosophy and theology. Indeed, Ratzinger makes these points about the beauty of Christ because he stays open to the pertinent philosophical arguments concerning beauty in philosophy in addition to his own reflections on real personal experiences of beauty.

Furthermore, according to Ratzinger, the beauty of Christ makes beautiful all who model their life on the same beauty of love.<sup>316</sup> It is important to embrace the role of *eros* in such a life, which goes against Nietzsche’s understanding of the Christian life as essentially representing aestheticism whereby *eros* is completely destroyed.<sup>317</sup> Ratzinger explains that the *eros* of Christianity is one that is purified and proves its value by stimulating the elevation of man in his quest for union with the divine.<sup>318</sup> *Eros*, which is built up and nurtured in a culture of beauty in full accordance with love and truth, is also ordered towards the unification of the internal structure of man’s being, such that his spirit and body, intellect, will and sentiment are united in the “all-embracing act of love”.<sup>319</sup> To unite one’s own being with love means to unite the intellect and will with that of God. One can then “see from the perspective of Jesus”, and so perceive “beyond external appearances”.<sup>320</sup> At this point, *eros* transforms into *agape*, so that one can say “I love even the person whom I do not like or even know”.<sup>321</sup> Indeed, *agape* is not the kind of love that looks inwardly at one’s own life, but a love that is willing to give up one’s life for another.

Ratzinger explains that the theological tradition of the Trinity as persons reveals that being is relational at its core and that this relationship is one of love. In order to reflect the beauty that is the divine being, one must reflect the relationship of

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<sup>316</sup> Spargo, *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, 43.

<sup>317</sup> Benedict XVI, "Deus Caritas Est". §3.

<sup>318</sup> Ratzinger, "Liturgy and Sacred Music," 386.

<sup>319</sup> Benedict XVI, "Deus Caritas Est". §17.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, §18.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

love that is God, and this involves the knowledge that love involves suffering.<sup>322</sup> This is because the metaphysical dimension of beauty as being-in-relation coincides with the understanding of beauty as *agape* expressed in the God who suffers and dies.

Ultimately, in presenting the paradoxical notion of the suffering beauty which is at once both truth and goodness, Ratzinger does not aim to give a simple formula that makes sense of beauty once and for all. In fact, by means of the paradox Ratzinger tells us that the reality of beauty is beyond our capacity to define it precisely because beauty is a person. However, this also means that we can know beauty personally in our hearts, which is not at all irrational, since this beauty is the person of *logos*. As such, beauty teaches us that reason does not preclude feeling and experience.

Whereas Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche focus on the immanent quality of the experience of the beautiful, Ratzinger ascribes to the Platonic-Augustinian tradition where the experience of beauty is understood to take us into a transcendental realm. At the same time, we remain in this world and come to know it better.

A true knowledge of being cannot be expressed or acquired through logical concepts alone, but it can be known precisely by the effect of beauty on the heart.<sup>323</sup> This points to a heart that is able to grasp reality with an expanded reason, one which does not lock beauty away in the limitations of philosophical discourse, but one which remains open to the broad experience of reality.

This openness of the heart means that it is not primarily the case that we “judge” beauty in an active sense, but rather we “experience” it in a passive sense. That is, beauty itself is to be considered active and the observer passive. Beauty shocks us and we are left emotionally and spiritually disturbed by the burning desire that it instills in our hearts.<sup>324</sup> Now, when the heart is so moved by beauty it desires to

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<sup>322</sup> "Apostolic Journey to France," General Audience, (2008).

<sup>323</sup> Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty". §11.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, §6.

unite itself to it, and by remaining open to the reality of beauty, the heart begins to see the truth in an intuitive way. Ratzinger proposes that in following this path of beauty, one can become convinced of the reality of God as truth and love in his overwhelming goodness. This truth is revealed each time beauty is encountered with a well-disposed heart.

In his aesthetics, Ratzinger rejects the theories that construe beauty as being merely an irrational sentiment, or a product of the subjective mind, or an element of the will to power, or a façade of a primal ugliness. It is by reflecting on the impact of beauty on his heart, as well as seriously considering the joint contribution of philosophy and theology that allows Ratzinger to reject these contrary theories and maintain his metaphysical view of beauty, which is truth and goodness and at the same time the suffering love of God.

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