

THOMISTIC BASES FOR A THEORY OF ESTHETICS

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Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

INTRODUCTION

At the present time there is a great deal of confusion regarding the proper place of a theory of beauty and art in the modern Thomistic philosophy. Some call such a theory a Thomistic Esthetic and give it a place among philosophic sciences separate from metaphysics, psychology and ethics. Those who take this view often believe that their theories fill the place which Aristotle's classification provides for the practical philosophy of production.

On the other hand, there are some who consider theories of beauty and art as mere collections of metaphysical, psychological and ethical principles. To these men, the true philosophy of production can be nothing other than the principles by which a thing is made, and these principles must be found in a consideration of the thing to be made. For example, a thorough examination of the purpose of a house will tell us how the house is to be made and will indicate the best material and plan, while these will in turn determine the best workmen and tools.

It is obvious that works being written today concerning the ultimate and ageless questions relative to beauty and art are speculative in character; these works do not attempt to formulate general principles to be applied to the production of particular things. When an attempt is made to

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define beauty and art, to explain their relations to other things, to tell the purpose of art, the inquiry must be speculative. They are correct, therefore, who distinguish between the practical philosophy of production and the speculative inquiry concerning beauty and art, and who insist that this speculative inquiry can only be philosophic if it proceed by entering the proper fields of metaphysics, psychology and ethics.

Yet it is not vain to collect the scattered principles relating to beauty and art and to compose them into a theory comparable to the many theories of esthetic, many of which are, in fact, false, which the reading public meet daily. For each of these theories must presuppose a complete philosophy of knowledge, of being, of man, of nature and of moral action. The reader, accepting false theories of art and beauty, derived from false philosophic systems, implicitly accepts the totality of the false system which has been presupposed. Again, it is all important that the philosophy of production be founded upon a true theory of art and beauty.

The followers of St. Thomas Aquinas have not been asleep. They have clearly seen the need which exists, for dangerous falsehood ought everywhere to be opposed with truth and error with correction. In this thesis we propose to return to the Angelic Doctor's own writings, to attempt to discover the most important principles from them relative

to the various problems concerning beauty and art, and to indicate various possible applications of these same principles leading to a solution of the chief problems.

Concerning beauty we shall consider the following questions: the situs of beauty, the nature of beauty, the relation between beauty and being, unity, goodness and truth. We shall also consider the manner in which beauty is apprehended and the manner in which we are delighted by the apprehension of beautiful things. Concerning art we shall consider the following questions: the nature of art in general, the problem of representation and the relation between art and prudence.

In considering all these questions, we wish to bring forward for consideration the true principles of the Angelic Doctor, departing in no way from them, and using them to indicate the truth of the conclusions of many other wise and learned men.

THOMISTIC BASES FOR A THEORY OF ESTHETICS

I. The Situs of Beauty

It is clear that two things cannot be the same in any given thing if the two are not really in that thing. For example, the content of this glass and water cannot be one and the same unless the glass spoken of really has content and unless that content is really water. Now St. Thomas states: "quod pulchrum et bonum in subiecto quidem sunt idem."¹ St. Thomas holds that goodness is objective; therefore, following him, we must conclude that beauty is also objective.

This conclusion is in agreement with the famous statement of St. Augustine concerning beauty:

Et prius quaeram utrum ideo pulchra sint quia delectent, an ideo delectent quia pulchra sint. Hic mihi sine dubitatione respondebitur, ideo delectare quia pulchra sunt.²

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1. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 5, art. 4, ad lum.
 2. De Vera Religione, c. 32.

St. Augustine's position is that this latter response is undoubtedly the correct one. Further, this is in agreement with a statement of St. Thomas concerning the good: "Non enim est res bona, quia diligo eam, sed quia res bona est, diligo eam."³

This basic proposition, that beauty is objective, is probably granted by every present-day scholastic. And it is not difficult to find the cause of unanimity, since, as the eminent master, Fr. Aloysius Rother, S. J., holds: A denial of the objectivity of beauty "is opposed to well-established conclusions, it leads to scepticism, and it, moreover, rests on confusion of ideas."⁴

Those who deny the objectivity of beauty may be divided into two groups. First, there are those who deny the objectivity of reality itself. Secondly, there are those sensists and materialists who, while admitting the objectivity of the extra-mental world, deny that any object is beautiful.

Now the answer to the first of these groups would involve a complete explanation of the scholastic theory of knowledge. We cannot, therefore, undertake such a reply here. But the objection of the second group is a direct attack upon our contention. We shall, therefore, reply to it.

Mr. Thomas Munro exposes the objection as follows:

3. In Evangelium secundum Matthaeum, c. 17.

4. Rother, Aloysius, S. J., Beauty, p. 107.

However, "beauty" itself can be given a broader definition, to include certain kinds of "ugliness," or of art and life which used to be considered ugly. By this definition the sordid and deformed, the rough, uncouth and irregular, images of pain and wickedness, can all be called beautiful, especially when conveyed in an artistic form. Anything which affords aesthetic satisfaction, which people enjoy looking at, listening to, or reading about for its own sake would thus be "beautiful" for them. Beauty, according to this definition, is not a purely objective trait which things can have in themselves, apart from people's responses to them. It is a name for these responses themselves, when they are projected upon the object and regarded as qualities of the object. Such a definition of beauty is in the tradition of Kames, Kant, and Thomas Brown through Santayana, who once defined beauty as "pleasure objectified," or "pleasure regarded as a quality of the thing."⁵

Now in replying to this objection it is necessary to distinguish carefully between the object, whatever it may be, with its qualities, and the one apprehending the object with his faculties, influenced by his dispositions. Each cognitive and appetitive act of the person presupposes some object, as seeing presupposes a colored thing and desiring presupposes a desirable thing. And it cannot be said that a desirable thing is only desirable because it is desired, because this would be to say that the act of desire is without cause within the object. This would mean that every object would be equally an object of desire, which is absurd, since we clearly desire some things more than others, and our desire of the same object is fairly regular and consistent. Likewise, therefore, it must be said that the delight following upon the apprehension of beauty is not without cause within the object, that the object has a real capacity

5. Munro, Thomas, The Arts and Their Interrelations, p. 89.

to delight one seeing it. We call this capacity beauty.⁶

Besides, to deny the objectivity of this capacity to delight one apprehending an object having it, is to deny, implicitly at least, the basis for all our judgments of value. All men judge some objects to be beautiful and good. We do not, for example, say, "I am good," when we wish to express our reason for the desire of some object. Now do we say, "I am beautiful," when we wish to explain the reason for our delight in the apprehension of some object. But this would be the truth of the matter if goodness and beauty were entirely subjective. Hence, to say that they are purely subjective is to deny the ability of the intellect to formulate any correct judgments in its study of values. This, as Fr. Rother points out, leads to scepticism.⁷ Mr. Herbert Ellsworth Cory sums up this argument quite neatly by saying, "If the objectivity of value is ignored, then axiological solipsism is inevitable, and the validity of all standards must be denied."⁸

Fr. Leonard Callahan, O. P., in his answer to the subjectivist arguments, proceeds by a process of elimination. If the delight which follows the apprehension of an object is not caused by something in the object apprehended, it is caused by something in the one apprehending. Now this cause

6. Following Suarez, Disputationes Metaphysicæ, X, 11.

7. Rother, loc. cit.

8. Cory, Herbert Ellsworth, The Significance of Beauty in Nature and Art, p. 34.

must act either of necessity or freely:

...not necessarily, however, since this is contrary to experience and consciousness, which attest the inconstancy and variability of our attitude towards beauty—facts which are incompatible with unerring and uniform operation of a faculty determined along one line. Nor can this experience be entirely free and independent of other factors; otherwise we could of our own accord arouse this sentiment independently of the presence of works of nature or of art. There is but one deduction—we do not create the esthetic impression or complacence, and consequently it must be provoked by something which is not ourselves; and this something not ourselves must be real ...⁹

It should be noted in connection with this argument, that it is not in the presence of the same object that our delight is inconstant and variable, since in the presence of the same object, we know that we are ordinarily delighted to about the same degree; rather, in the presence of diverse objects, we experience different degrees of delight.

⁹. Callahan, Leonard, O. P., A Theory of Esthetic, According to the Principles of St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 30-31.

Having shown beauty to be objective, we are now faced with a further difficulty. What things are beautiful, and in what way are beautiful objects beautiful? In other words, is beauty a transcendental?

II. Whether Beauty is a Transcendental

St. Thomas states: "Unumquodque est pulchrum secundum propriam formam;" and again, "Nihil est quod non participat pulchro et bono cum unumquodque sit pulchrum et bonum secundum propriam formam."¹⁰ Mr. Jacques Maritain considers that these remarks indicate that St. Thomas holds beauty to be a transcendental. "St. Thomas constantly affirms that the beautiful and the good, metaphysically, are the same thing in reality and differ only conceptually," Mr. Maritain begins. But if this is true, he continues, "why should not the beautiful be a transcendental as well as the good?" To complete the argument he quotes St. Thomas' remarks above.¹¹

Mr. Cory, also holding beauty to be a transcendental property of being, asks the question:

Does this mean that all objects are beautiful? I answer unflinchingly: in so far as they are beings, yes. In so far as they have arrived at their perfection—and all beings, in contrast with nonbeings (sic) have gone some distance on the way of fulfillment—yes. In so far as they do not suffer from a lacking, in so far as they are not privative—yes.¹²

10. In Div. Nom., c. 5, l. 4.

11. Maritain, Jacques, Art and Scholasticism, pp. 132-133.

12. Cory, op. cit., p. 47.

Mr. Maritain would undoubtedly agree, affirming the same; to do so follows necessarily if beauty is, indeed, a transcendental. And this proposition seems undeniable; the argument as presented is very strong.

But there is by no means unanimity among modern scholastic writers on this point. Often, those who deny that beauty is a transcendental do not quote St. Thomas' statements in the Commentary on Divine Names. Rather, they remark that obviously many things are not beautiful, and can be called beautiful by no extension of the term. This position seems to be more in accord with the teaching of St. Augustine, who holds beauty to be the splendor of order. Apparently, some authors who follow St. Thomas' teaching on many points prefer to follow St. Augustine's on certain questions. This procedure, in itself, is not to be condemned. The only question which arises is this: Is it possible to follow St. Thomas' doctrine on one point and to prefer a diverse interpretation of St. Augustine on another point, if these two points are closely related or interdependent?

Cardinal Mercier, for example, states: "What is beautiful is good, but not all that is good is beautiful."¹³ It is significant that the famous leader does not consider beauty with his consideration of transcendentals, but with the treatise on causality, following a section on order.

13. Cardinal Mercier, A Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy, p. 564.

Again, Fr. Rother holds that things are not called beautiful unless they are conspicuously perfect. And therefore, he says that strictly speaking, not everything is beautiful. Beauty is not a transcendental. On the other hand, all things are potentially beautiful, inasmuch as they may enter into the constitution of beautiful objects. A worn and chipped brick, for example, would not be itself beautiful, but it might be called beautiful inasmuch as it might participate the beauty of an ancient and lovely castle of which it might be a part.¹⁴

Is it possible, that admitting all things to be beautiful, we can escape the conclusion that beauty is a transcendental?

Fr. Henri Renard, S. J., suggests:

We say, nevertheless, that "the beautiful" partakes both of "the good" and of "the true". It partakes of "the good" because it quiets the appetite; and of "the true" because it is knowledge, vision, objective union. "The beautiful", therefore, although transcendental, is not a distinct transcendental concept for it is contained in the notion of "the true" and of "the good".¹⁵

But this does not seem sufficient for the solution of the problem. If all the transcendentals are the same in the thing, and if all differ in the mind, as Maritain says, why then is beauty not a transcendental as well as the good? The question may very well be: Do these conditions sufficiently delimit a concept so that it is a transcendental?

14. Rother, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

15. Renard, Henri, S. J., Philosophy of Being, p. 191.

Fr. Callahan suggests a distinction. "Everything in nature is beautiful if we consider it wholly in regard to its specific type...for the nature is the ideal with which the individual should conform." This seems to be an affirmation of transcendental truth, rather than of beauty. Then he continues: "But everything is not formally beautiful as it exists in a state of singularity." The conclusion is that beauty "does not belong to the order of Transcendentals (sic)."¹⁶ The difficulty with this argument is that beauty is objective, as we have shown above. Things do not exist as specific types but as singulars. Therefore, if things are not beautiful as they exist, they are not beautiful at all. This argument is in conflict with St. Thomas' position that there is nothing which does not participate in beauty.

This brings us to an impasse. It seems we must either admit that St. Thomas is correct, and admit that beauty is a transcendental; or we deny that St. Thomas is correct and hold that some things do not participate in beauty. Does this exhaust the possible courses?

It seems to us doubtful that it does. If beauty is, indeed, a transcendental, it is strange that St. Thomas does not say so.¹⁷ Perhaps, then, there is some explanation

16. Callahan, op. cit., p. 75.

17. De Ver., qu. 1, art. 1; St. Thomas enumerates the transcendentals using distinctions and discusses them. He does not include beauty. Mr. Maritain finds an affirmation
(over)

possible, which may admit the truth of St. Thomas' statement but still can deny that beauty is a transcendental. To produce such an explanation, however, is a task which we must leave for others, as being too great for our present ability.

17. (continued) of the transcendental character of beauty in the identification of beauty with goodness in subjects. (Sum. Theol., I, qu. 5, art. 4, ad lum.) But since the statement does not explicitly demand that beauty be a transcendental, it seems to us that some other solution might be found.

Thus leaving the answer to the question: "Is beauty a transcendental?" for others, we proceed to a consideration of beauty in relation to the good. This relationship is explained by St. Thomas, and we believe that it is of great importance for a full knowledge of beauty to give some consideration to the words of the Angelic Doctor on this subject.

III. The Beautiful and the Good

St. Thomas states:

...quod pulchrum et bonum in subiecto quidem sunt idem, quia super eandem rem fundantur, scilicet super formam; et propter hoc, bonum laudatur ut pulchrum. Sed ratione differunt. Nam bonum proprie respicit appetitum; est enim bonum quod omnia appetunt. Et ideo habet rationem finis, nam appetitus est quasi quidam motus ad rem. Pulchrum autem respicit vim cognoscitivam; pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent. ...¹⁸

Again he states:

...quod pulchrum est idem bono sola ratione differens. Cum enim bonum sit quod omnia appetunt, de ratione boni est quod in eo quietetur appetitus; sed ad rationem pulchri pertinet quod in eius aspectu seu cognitione quietetur appetitus.¹⁹

In these two brief statements the Angelic Doctor draws a clear distinction between the beautiful and the good.

When an object is considered as desirable simply, then we call it good; when an object is considered as desirable

18. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 5, art. 4, ad lum.

19. Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 27, art. 1, ad 3um.

for the purpose of cognitive consideration, then we call it beautiful. Appetite rests in the very possession of the good, but cognitive appetite also rests in the mere apprehension of the beautiful.

Both beauty and goodness are founded on the form of the reality. It is important concerning this point to turn back at the outset any materialistic interpretation of form. It should be noted that the form of which St. Thomas speaks here is not the shape or figure, which is a mere accidental quality, but is rather the primary form by which a thing is constituted in being, and through which comes all its actuality and perfection.

As a result of this distinction between the beautiful and the good, we should note the disinterestedness of man in regard to beautiful things considered as beautiful.²⁰

Fr. Callahan takes the example of a finely spread table.

If an admirer of the beautiful considers it, he may be filled with delight by it, but not as considered as food to be eaten.

A hungry man, on the other hand, will also be filled with delight by such a table, but only as ordered to the satisfaction of hunger.²¹

As St. Thomas remarks: "Solus homo delectatur in ipsa pulchritudine sensibilium secundum seipsam."²²

20. We use the word, disinterestedness, here in order to show the agreement of the Thomistic doctrine with that of the moderns, among whom Kant is often credited as having been the first to discover that we do not regard the beautiful as something desired but as something already possessed—possessed, of course, intentionally.

21. Callahan, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

22. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 91, art. 3, c..

It is important to note, also, that "pulchritudo non habet rationem appetibilis nisi inquantum induit rationem boni."²³

23. I Sent., D. 31, qu. 2, art. 1, ad 4um.

When we have once distinguished between the beautiful and the good, we seem to be faced with the necessity of asserting the absolute identity of the beautiful and the true. For if the beautiful is that whose mere apprehension causes appetitive satisfaction, as we have said in the foregoing section, how can we distinguish the beautiful from the true? We must, therefore, consider the relation between the beautiful and the true.

IV. The Beautiful and the True

It is undeniable that the apprehension of any truth may cause a certain satisfaction. Ask any man who is avid after truth if his search does not, when it is successful, end with the greatest and purest of joys.

Yet a distinction seems possible. St. Thomas speaking of the true, remarks that it, unlike the good, resides formally in the intellect.

...Nam per vim appetitivam anima habet ordinem ad ipsas res prout in seipsis sunt; unde Philosophus dicit in VI Metaphysicae, quod 'bonum et malum', quae sunt objecta appetitivae potentiae, 'sunt in ipsis rebus.' Vis autem apprehensiva non trahitur ad rem secundum quod in seipsa est; sed cognoscit eam secundum intentionem rei, quam in se habet vel recipit secundum proprium modum. Unde et ibidem dicitur quod "verum et falsum", quae ad cognitionem pertinent, "non sunt in rebus, sed in mente." Unde patet quod ratio passionis magis invenitur in parte appetitiva quam in parte apprehensiva.²⁴

24. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 22, art. 2, c.

And, in fact, we know from experience that the apprehension of beauty calls for consent and not for assent. When we see a beautiful painting we are more likely to say, "It is very good," than "It is very true."

Fr. Callahan remarks that "there is a closer relationship between the beautiful and the good than between the beautiful and the true. In the Thomistic theory," for, indeed, Fr. Callahan holds that there is such a theory, "the beautiful is the good inasmuch as it affords contemplative delight. ..."25 This remark seems important. We consider it to be in perfect accord with St. Thomas' teachings.

Likewise, Fr. Rother makes a clear distinction between the delight which we experience in the true and that which we gain from the beautiful.

...The delights which accompany the discovery of the truth are keen and stirring, the delights which attend the apprehension of the beautiful are gentle and soothing. The pleasures of pure knowledge may be experienced by the most perverse, the hard, the cold, the cruel; they may be felt by the penetrating intellect of the tyrant when he has hit upon some ingenious plan of ridding himself of a rival. But the satisfaction proceeding from the sight of the beautiful is the portion of the imaginative, of the generous, of the affectionate. Mere knowledge, keen and penetrating, may lead to hatred; the perception of the beautiful gives birth to love.²⁶

Thus we note that in Fr. Rother's opinion the perception of the beautiful is not accompanied by long discursion and that

25. Callahan, op. cit., p. 38.

26. Rother, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

it leads directly to love.

It would seem, then, that the famous definition, "Beauty is the splendor of the true," is false.²⁷ For if this were true, beauty would be formally in the intellect, and would not differ from the true except in the consequences of the recognition of logical truth.

27. Coffey, Peter, Ontology, p. 201: Concerning the splendor of the true, as a definition for beauty, Mr. Coffey remarks: "This definition, commonly ascribed to Plato, but without reason, is inadequate and ambiguous." The true source of the "definition" is unknown.

It is widely held that beauty is order. To discover St. Thomas' teachings on this point, a long inquiry would be necessary. We are forced here to limit our inquiry and summarize our findings.

V. The Beautiful and Order

In question 105, article one (Summa I-II), several reasons are alleged to show that the Old Law did not make fitting provision concerning rulers. To these objections, St. Thomas replies on the contrary:

...quod populus Israel de pulchritudine ordinis commendatur, Num. xxiv: "Quam pulchra sunt tabernacula tua, Jacob; et tentoria tua, Israel!" Sed pulchritudo ordinis populi dependet ex principibus bene institutis. Ergo per legem populus fuit circa principes bene institutus.²⁸

The use of the phrase, pulchritudo ordinis, seems to exclude the equation of beauty with either order or the splendor of order, for in the former case the phrase would mean the order of order and in the latter the splendor of order of order, both of which are equally redundant. Rather, we should say that St. Thomas' use of the phrase, pulchritudo ordinis, here, indicates that he considers order an immediate cause of beauty, at least in this case, although not identical with it.

Order, generally speaking, means arrangement. It implies four causes: a cause operating with intelligence to produce

28. Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 105, art. 1, sed con..

the order, an end, a multiplicity to be ordered, and the very relations between the members of the multitude. According to Mr. Coffey, every order can be viewed under two aspects. He distinguishes them thus:

...dynamic, or that of subordination, and static, or that of co-ordination: the right arrangement of means towards ends, and the right arrangement of parts in a whole, or members in a system. The latter is determined by the formal causes of things and expresses primarily their beauty. The former indicates the influence of final causes and expresses primarily the goodness of things. The order essential to beauty consists in this, that the manifold and distinct things or acts which contribute to it must form a whole. Hence order has been defined as unity in variety:...

This seems to be based on St. Thomas' common distinction.

He teaches that:

...sicut Philosophus dicit in xii Metaphysicæ, bonum multitudinis, sicut exercitus, est duplex. Unum quidem quod est in ipsa multitudine, puta ordo exercitus. Aliud autem quod est separatim a multitudine, sicut bonum ducis;...³⁰

Mr. Coffey's analysis seems in real agreement with St. Augustine's remark: "Nihil est ordinatum quod non sit pulchrum."³¹

Fr. Rother, indeed, holds that beauty is order attaining some degree of perfection. He stresses the beauty of mathematical figures: "So much beauty is there in mathematical figures that the type of beauty according to many is a wavy line called the 'line of beauty.'³²

29. Coffey, op. cit., p. 199.

30. Sum. Theol., I. qu. 111, art. 5, ad lum.

31. Quoted in Coffey without reference, op. cit., p. 200.

32. Rother, op. cit., p. 62.

Mr. Eric Gill says: "Beauty is the Splendour of Being. The primary constituent of visible Being is Order. Beauty in architecture is visible order—order shining out."³³

Mr. DeWitt H. Parker gives a short explanation of the modern attitude towards order. This opinion holds that for beauty there must be a marked conflict among ordered parts—a trembling on the verge of dissolution. This is not necessarily out of harmony with the above explanations: conflict in ordered unity might easily make the order more remarkable.

Aesthetic balance is the unity between elements which, while they oppose or conflict with one another, nevertheless, need or supplement one another.³⁴

Considering the number of learned men who have held the theory of beauty which emphasizes the importance of order, it might seem presumptuous of us to question it. We may only ask: What, exactly, do you mean by order? Is not a well made syllogism a better example of order than a loosely constructed poem? Yet may not the poem be more beautiful? We do not propose to settle the question here, but it seems to us that there is more to beauty than order or splendor of order, whatever may be meant by this latter.

33. Gill, Eric, Beauty Looks after Herself, p. 66.

34. Parker, DeWitt H., The Principles of Aesthetics, p. 72.

In various considerations of esthetic problems, one of the chief chapters is almost always devoted to a consideration of the basic objective conditions for beauty, the conditions which find realization in every object which is called beautiful. We must, therefore, give some thought to this problem.

VI. The Requirements for Beauty

St. Thomas states:

...ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem integritas sive perfectio; quae enim diminuta sunt, hoc ipso turpia sunt. Et debita proportio sive consonantia. Et iterum claritas; unde quae habent colorem nitidum, pulchra esse dicuntur.³⁵

Again he says:

...addit Philosophus tertium (4 Ethic., cap. 6) ubi dicit quod pulchritudo non est nisi in magno corpore; unde parvi homines possunt dici commensurati vel formati, sed non pulchri.³⁶

Concerning integrity, St. Thomas elsewhere explains:

...quod duplex est integritas. Una quae attenditur secundum perfectionem primam, quae consistit in ipso esse rei; alia quae attenditur secundum perfectionem secundam, quae consistit in operatione.³⁷

Concerning due proportion and clarity:

Forma autem a qua dependet propria ratio rei, pertinet ad claritatem; ordo ad finem, ad consonantiam, et sic motus et quies reducuntur in causalitatem pulchri.³⁸

35. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 39, art. 8, c..

36. I Sent., D. 31, qu. 2, art. 1, c..

37. IV Sent., D. 26, qu. 2, art. 4, c..

38. In Div. Nom., c. 4, l. 6.

Cardinal Mercier remarks that for an object to be beautiful "it must have its own completeness and not be a fragment of itself. And in addition to this negative condition it must also present a certain fulness of being..."³⁹ In regard to the second condition, due proportion, he offers an explanation of co-ordinate order.⁴⁰ He considers clarity to be the result of perfect order: "...the third esthetic quality, clearness or brilliancy, or if we may be allowed to call it so, 'striking force,' is a consequent of the two preceding ones."⁴¹ We might note that anyone who reduces due proportion to order, ought logically to follow the Cardinal's example, reducing clarity to the result of the order which is present.

Mr. Coffey makes a similar analysis. Concerning the first element, integrity, he remarks: "The truncated statue, the stunted oak, the deformed animal, the crippled human being, are not beautiful."⁴² He also mentions largeness or amplitude, considering it to be an absolute requirement, not merely one relative to the nature of the thing in question. "The little, the trifling, the insignificant, the commonplace, evokes no feeling of admiration. The sight of the small pasture field leaves us indifferent; but the vision of vast expanses of cornfield and meadow and woodland exhilarates us."⁴²

39. Mercier, op. cit., pp. 567-568.

40. ibid..

41. ibid..

42. Coffey, op. cit., p. 198.

Fr. Renard holds that St. Thomas' requirements are only objective conditions necessary for the human apprehension of beauty. For Fr. Renard, "Every being is beautiful, and 'the beautiful' is 'being'." Thus, no conditions can exclude beauty from any object.⁴³

Mr. Maritain makes an interesting exposition of these difficult concepts: integrity, due proportion, and clarity. He holds that they "must be taken in a most formal sense."⁴⁴ He proceeds to expound and his answer comes to this: perfection is being; proportion is goodness; clarity is truth.

But what St. Thomas says, his examples and his remarks, seem to prohibit so formal an interpretation. Whatever he means by them in other instances, it seems only reasonable to suppose that he is here using the words in a much less formal sense. By integrity he apparently means that a thing must have all the parts which a thing of its nature should have. By proportion he seems to indicate good balance or symmetry. Clarity means sensible brightness: in the sense of sight, this is color. Magnitude means large size, possibly even, size a little larger than a thing of its kind would usually be expected to have.

The difficulties entailed by an attempt to explain these requirements in a formal and transcendental sense, constitutes one of the most serious objections to such an interpretation, it seems to us.

43. Renard, op. cit., p. 191.

44. Maritain, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

Granting that there is beauty in objective reality and leaving aside metaphysical considerations, the greatest problem which looms before us is a psychological one: how does man apprehend beauty? Both St. Thomas and his modern followers have had something to say in regard to this problem, and it is our present task to consider their words.

VII. The Apprehension of Beauty

In answering an objection seeking to make a complete identification of the beautiful and the good, St. Thomas states that:

...pulchrum autem respicit vim cognoscitivam; pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent. Unde pulchrum in debita proportione consistit, quia sensus delectatur in rebus debite proportionatis, sicut in sibi similibus, nam et sensus ratio quaedam est, et omnis virtus cognoscitiva. Et quia cognitio fit per assimilationem, similitudo autem respicit formam, pulchrum proprie pertinet ad rationem causae formalis.⁴⁵

Likewise, in the prima-secundae, having explained the relation between the beautiful and the good, he explains:

...Unde et illi sensus praecipue respiciunt pulchrum, qui maxime cognoscitivi sunt, scilicet visus et auditus rationi deservientis; dicimus enim pulchra visibilia et pulchros sonos. In sensibilibus autem aliorum sensuum non utimur nomine pulchritudinis; non enim dicimus pulchros sapes aut odores. Et sic patet quod pulchrum addit supra bonum quandam ordinem ad vim cognoscitivam; ita quod bonum dicatur id quod simpliciter complacet appetitui; pulchrum autem dicatur id cuius ipsa apprehensio placet.⁴⁶

45. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 5, art. 4, ad lum.

46. Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 27, art. 1, ad Sum.

Lastly, explaining the fitness of man's posture, the Angelic Doctor proposes several proofs:

...Primo quidem, quia sensus dati sunt homini non solum ad vitae necessaria procuranda, sicut aliis animalibus, sed etiam ad cognoscendum. Unde cum cetera animalia non delectentur in sensibilibus nisi per ordinem ad cibos et venerea, solus homo delectatur in ipsa pulchritudine sensibilibus secundum seipsam.⁴⁷

We shall allow these statements of the Angelic Doctor to stand by themselves.

Fr. Rother holds, "That the beautiful cannot be apprehended by sense but by intellect only. Hence the delight which the beautiful affords is not sensible delight."⁴⁸ He explains that animals cannot apprehend beauty; man has the same sense faculties that animals have; ergo, beauty cannot be apprehended by sense. Besides, man knows by experience that he does not apprehend beauty by sense. Besides, beauty consists in order; order is not sensible; ergo, beauty is not sensible.⁴⁹

Mr. Maritain has a most singular theory. He claims that the visa in quae visa placent must be taken in a very formal sense, and that it indicates an "intuition." This mysterious intuition, which St. Thomas fails to explain in his writings, might be thought to be a happy method of solving the whole problem. By it one knows beauty intellectually in the sensible species, according to Mr. Maritain, and not through any process of abstraction or discursive reasoning.

47. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 91, art. 3, ad 2um.

48. Rother, op. cit., p. 5.

49. ibid., pp. 5-16.

...So we may say—it is, in my opinion, the only meaning to give to the words of St. Thomas—that in the perception of the beautiful the mind is, by means of the intuition of the senses, itself confronted with a glittering intelligibility (derived, like every intelligibility, in the last analysis from the first Intelligibility of the Divine Ideas), which by the very fact that it produces the joy of the beautiful cannot be detached or separated from its matrix of the senses. ...⁵⁰

Fr. Renard is among those who have accepted this explanation. He remarks that "this experience of the individual is often so vague that it cannot be translated into words, and is not capable of being analyzed."⁵¹

St. Thomas, however, states that: "singulare in rebus materialibus intellectus noster directe, et primo cognoscere non potest."⁵² Fr. Renard, in his Philosophy of Man, explains the manner in which our intellect is able to know the singular in material things.

...In this life, in order to understand reality which is existing in the singular, we must turn to the phantasm. By this turn, or reversion, we do not mean that the intellect tends toward the phantasm by a direct cognition—since the phantasm is not its object of knowledge—but that it does so by a reflection. Knowing its own act, the intellect comes to a knowledge of the intelligible species which is the principle of the act, and, at the same time, it knows the phantasm from which the agent intellect abstracted the species. Through this contact with the phantasm, the intellect perceives the singular.⁵³

In this explanation Fr. Renard follows St. Thomas very closely. It is hardly necessary to say that the knowledge of the

50. Maritain, op. cit., pp. 124-125.

51. Renard, op. cit., p. 189.

52. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 86, art. 1, c..

53. Renard, Philosophy of Man, p. 144.

singular gained by this method is not intuitive. There would seem to be, then, a difficulty in Mr. Maritain's intuition of beauty. To hold his theory, one must apparently abandon St. Thomas' theory of intellectual knowledge, at least in parts. When Fr. Renard, in his Philosophy of Being, speaks of the apprehension of beauty, he seems to contradict his interpretation of St. Thomas' theory of the apprehension of the singular, which he holds to in his Philosophy of Man. Of course, perhaps Mr. Maritain and his followers would be willing to grant that the apprehension of beauty follows the normal manner of the apprehension of singulars, just as explained above. However, in speaking of the apprehension of beauty, they do not make this clear, and the definition of intuition seems to preclude the possibility of holding Mr. Maritain's theory of the apprehension of beauty and St. Thomas' doctrine concerning the intellectual knowledge of singulars at the same time.

Mr. Cory appears to have accepted Mr. Maritain's theory. But he concedes that "there is a sort of lightning flux of intuition proper and of concept; the two sign a sort of truce; but the result is at best a hybrid."⁵⁴ Then the author goes on to make one of the most questionable attempts to explain this baffling apprehension:

Who can tell, moreover, to what extent the beauty-maker and the beauty-lover receive from God certain "actual graces," as the theologian calls them, which, although the artist and the art-and-nature-lover are not utterly possessed by God, yet bring them to a level though far lower

54. Cory, op. cit., pp. 88-91.

than, yet within all hail of, the mystic and his genuinely infused intuition, who, inflamed by some "extraordinary grace" from God, is almost ready to converse with the angels this side of beatitude.⁵⁵

Fr. Callahan also seems to follow Mr. Maritain on this question:

A very special kind of knowledge is required for the discernment of beauty; mere sensible perception is not enough, a simple disposition of the material; scientific knowledge is too abstract. Esthetic knowledge is spontaneous, intuitive, in a manner perfect. This feature has been noted by several philosophers, by Ruskin, for example, who requires that the beautiful give pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities without direct or definite exertion of the intellect. ... Aquinas preferred to call it vision or apprehension, to convey the idea that there is no need for effort at abstraction, no labor, no discursus of reasoning.⁵⁶

Can we hold that reflection is only necessary after abstraction, but that it is unnecessary if the intellect knows the singular immediately without abstracting? In other words, can we hold that the intellect in the apprehension of beauty does not abstract? We cannot follow St. Thomas and hold this. St. Thomas, explaining a passage from Aristotle, says "quod Philosophus loquitur de intellectu nostro, qui non intelligit res, nisi abstrahendo; et per ipsam abstractionem a materialibus conditionibus id, quod abstrahitur, fit universale."⁵⁷

Cardinal Mercier holds a different theory. He says that the apprehension of beauty is the "active perception of certain relations that a work realizes."

55. ibid., p. 91.

56. Callahan, op. cit., p. 41.

57. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 57, art. 2, ad lum.

If it be asked, What are these relations we speak of? it will be found that they are relations of the concrete work to an ideal type which enables us to grasp the perfection of the work. By the perception of these relations to what it should be to be perfect do we come to know its beauty.⁵⁸

The Cardinal's answer seems to be that the object is apprehended in a normal manner. As we understand it, he would place the apprehension of beauty in a judgment of the intellect, consequent upon reflection, in which we discover the perfect proportion of the accidental qualities to the specific nature of the object in question. The object is judged to have what it should have, to be what it should be. In a word, it is judged perfect or beautiful.

In conclusion, we can only refer once more to the three statements of the Angelic Doctor concerning the apprehension of beauty which we quoted at the beginning of this chapter. In these statements, nor elsewhere in St. Thomas' writings, is there, to our knowledge, any mention of the intellect in regard to the apprehension of beauty.⁵⁹ We cannot now solve the problem of the precise manner of apprehension. This task, as others, we must leave for the future, recognizing that the full and sound explanation in accord with St. Thomas' principles has yet to be given.

58. Mercier, op. cit., p. 566.

59. See above, pp. 23-24.

In addition to the primary psychological consideration concerning the apprehension of beauty, we are faced with a secondary subjective question concerning the delight which is joined with that apprehension. The solution to this question has received little attention from the modern followers of St. Thomas, yet it is a problem well worthy of close scrutiny.

VIII. Beauty and Delight

We will recall first a pertinent passage from St. Thomas which we have already quoted above. The Angelic Doctor teaches that:

...sensus delectatur in rebus debita proportionatis, sicut in sibi similibus, nam et sensus ratio quaedam est, et omnis virtus cognoscitiva.⁶⁰

The first doubt which might arise in interpreting this passage is in the words: "in rebus debita proportionatis." Does this mean, "in things in themselves duly proportioned;" or "in things duly proportioned to the senses?" The former understanding seems to be the more easily defended. The meaning, if the former interpretation is correct, is that the senses, themselves proportioned, are delighted in things which are in themselves proportioned, because of the likeness between sense and object.

But why should likeness be a cause of delight? We will note that likeness is a cause of love: "Like loves like," is

60. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 5, art. 4, ad lum.

an old saying. The reason for this is that everything by its nature loves itself. That which is like oneself is one with oneself to the precise degree that it is like oneself. Therefore, what is like oneself participates in the love which one naturally bears for himself. At the same time, what is similar to oneself causes one to delight in it as in himself.⁶¹

Considering this argument, we are not surprised to learn that St. Thomas also teaches that "omnis homo amat pulchrum."⁶²

Fr. Rother summarizes and explains the resolution of the question concerning our delight in the beautiful, in accord with his understanding of our apprehension of it. According to him, there are a number of distinct phases in this delight. First, there is the delight in the sense faculties themselves, due to the fact that they are operating as they should and that their object is proportioned to them. Second, there is the pure intellectual delight, the delight of contemplation. Third, there is an intellective delight occasioned by the will-act of love. Fourth, there is a redundant delight in the sense, following the operation of intellect and will. The basis of all delight is that our faculties are working easily and naturally on a lovable and loved object.⁶³

61. See, Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 32, art. 7, c..

62. In Psal. Dav., Ps. xxv, v. v..

63. Rother, op. cit., pp. 21-45 and 79-83.

We have now finished our consideration of the metaphysical and psychological questions concerning beauty, having considered them only to the degree which our present ability and the limitations of our subject allow. We shall now enter upon a consideration of three questions concerning art: art in general, the object of representative art, and art and prudence.

IX. Art in General

St. Thomas teaches:

...quod ars nihil aliud est quam ratio recta aliquorum operum faciendorum. Quorum tamen bonum non consistit in eo quod appetitus humanus aliquo modo se habet, sed in eo quod ipsum opus quod fit, in se bonum est. Non enim pertinet ad laudem artificis, inquantum artifex est, qua voluntate opus faciat, sed quale sit opus (quod) facit. Sic igitur ars proprie loquendo habitus operativus est.⁶⁴

Here is a concise statement concerning the nature of art, a definition for which the moderns seek in vain.

Art is an operative habit, a virtue of the practical intellect, a quality inhering in the artist but tending to the perfection of the work to be made.⁶⁵ Mr. Maritain notes:

Manual dexterity therefore is not part of art, but merely a material and extrinsic condition; the labor by which the virtuoso who "plays the harp" acquires agile fingers does not increase his art itself or produce any special form; it

64. Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 57, art. 3, c..

65. Facere in this passage signifies the human operation only in regard to its passage into exterior matter; agere, on the other hand, signifies the operation of the artist, disregarding the passage into exterior matter. See: Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 57, art. 4, c..

merely removes a physical impediment to the practice of his art: non generat novam artem, sed tollit impedimentum exercitii eius; art remains entirely by the side of the mind.⁶⁶

We can use this word, art, in the plural to denote aptitudes to various works: thus we can say medical art, logical art, or graphic art. If any art is perfect it extends to all those things which can be effected more perfectly by one having it. "Thus the art of building, if perfect, extends to whatever can have the nature of a house."⁶⁷

The arts are distinguished or individuated by the end to be achieved. The medical art is different from the tonorial art, for the end of the former is to co-operate with nature in producing health in the patient, while the end of the latter is to improve the appearance of the patient by clipping his hair. And it ought to be noted that the medical artist does not become a tonorial artist if he clip the hair of a patient in order to produce health in him. Nor does the tonorial artist become a medical artist if he apply a health-producing lotion to the scalp of a patient in order to improve his appearance.

St. Thomas teaches that art is an imperfect virtue. Art does not, by itself, perfect the artist so that he will use well the art which he has. St. Thomas states that:

66. Maritain, op. cit., p. 11. The Latin quotation is from John of St. Thomas, Curs. Phil., Log. II, qu. 1, art. 5.

67. Cont. Gent., II, c. xxii.

...ad hoc ut homo bene utatur arte quam habet, requiritur bona voluntas, quae perficitur per virtutem moralem, ideo Philosophus dicit quod artis est virtus, scilicet moralis, in quantum ad bonum usum eius aliqua virtus moralis requiritur. Manifestum est enim quod artifex per iustitiam, quae facit voluntatem rectam, inclinatur ut opus fidele faciat.⁶⁸

It must not be thought that justice need only accompany art if the one having the art has agreed by contract to make a certain work. Rather, it is at all times necessary; in order that the artist may use well the art which he has, his will must be perfected by justice.

The chief reason for this is that man is naturally a social animal, as Aristotle says in the first book of his Ethics. St. Thomas comments on this statement:

...This is evident from the fact that one man does not suffice for himself if he live alone: because the things are few wherein nature makes adequate provision for man, since she gave him his reason whereby he might provide himself all the necessities of life, such as food, clothes, and so forth, for the production of which one man is not enough. Wherefore man has a natural inclination to social life.⁶⁹

One purpose of the human reason is, therefore, to enable man to produce things necessary to life. Art perfects the reason in regard to this end. Therefore, it is necessary that a man use well the art which he has, to the benefit of himself and his fellows, with whom he must live in society. Artistic production is necessarily limited by man's social obligation.

68. Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 57, art. 3, ad 2um.

69. Cont. Gent., III, c. lxxxv.

Art, tending to the perfection of an external work, must be exercised with an eye to the possible effects of the work upon other men, effects for good or for evil, for greater or lesser good. Without the moral virtue of justice perfecting his will, a man cannot use well the art which he has. Therefore, the moral virtue of justice is necessary to perfect the intellectual virtue of art.

Many in modern times hold that the end of art is in the artist himself, that it makes no difference whether the object made is a perfect work, so long as the artist in some way benefits from using his art. St. Thomas teaches, on the contrary, that:

...bonum artis consideratur non in ipso artifice, sed magis in ipso artificiato, cum ars sit ratio recta factibilium; factio enim in exteriorem materiam transiens non est perfectio facientis, sed facti, sicut motus est agtus mobilis; ars autem circa factibilia est.

Therefore, it is an artistic sin, that is a deviation from the end of art, if the artist place his own welfare or pleasure before art's proper end, which is the object to be made.

Mr. Eric Gill, in his own characteristic way, makes the same points which we have just been discussing concerning the end of art and the necessity of justice.

We will not talk about art. We will demand responsibility, saying that, as we do the work, we will do it as we choose. We will sell things at

70. Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 57, art. 5, ad lum.

our own workshops and deal directly with our own customers, and we shall leave the factory and the contracting system behind us. But though we claim the right of choice, yet, the reader will note, we admit obligations. The obligations of the workman to the customer and to the community are even more obvious and natural than those of the trader—the trader being merely to sell the things, the worker to make them. Men do not naturally make things which please only themselves, if only to keep them amiable, they naturally consider their customers. But a shopkeeper will sell anything, whatever he thinks of it. He is irresponsible. He has no interest in things made other than their market value.⁷¹

71. Gill, Art Nonsense and Other Essays, p. 93.

Among the objects which man may produce by art are representations. These are often considered beautiful, and at times are produced solely for their beauty. We shall, therefore, take them into special consideration.

X. Representations

In the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the eleventh chapter, Our Lord speaks to the multitude concerning John the Baptist. As He speaks, He makes use of a similitude, saying:

...As for this generation, to what shall I compare it? It reminds me of those children who call out to their companions as they sit in the marketplace, and say, You would not dance when we piped to you, or beat the breast when we wept to you.⁷²

St. Thomas, commenting upon the Holy Gospel, advances a theory of representation, as he writes concerning this passage:

...Similis est pueris sedentibus in foro etc. Hic ponit quandam similitudinem; et potest exponi secundum planum litterae vel secundum mysticum sensum. Primo ponit similitudinem de pueris. Secundo adaptat eam, ibi, Venit Ioannes, etc. Notandum enim quod naturale est hominibus quaerere delectationibus, et semper quaerit illas, et nisi abstrahatur per sollicitudines, statim ruit in malas delectationes; sed pueri non habent sollicitudines, ideo vacant circa illa, quae sibi competunt, hoc est ludere. Item notandum, quod homo naturaliter sociale est, et hoc quia naturaliter unus alio indiget, unde delectatur in convictu; unde Philosophus dicit l. Polit. Omnis homo qui solitarius est, aut est melior homine, et est Deus; aut peior homine, et est bestia; unde dicitur, Sedentibus in foro, quia nullus per se vult ludere, sed in foro, ubi fit congregatio multorum. Item notandum, quod naturale est homini

72. St. Matthew, 11:16-18, tr. Ronald Knox.

quod delectatus eius sit in aliqua representatione, unde si videamus aliquem bene stultum quod bene repraesentat quod debet, tunc delectamur; ideo pueri qui delectatur in ludis, semper ludos suos faciunt cum aliqua repraesentatione vel belli, vel huiusmodi.⁷³

The first difficulty in this theory is that a good representation of an ugly thing would seemingly more properly be called ugly than beautiful. St. Thomas answers this by saying that "aliqua imago dicitur esse pulchra, si perfecte repraesentat rem, quamvis turpem."⁷⁴ To understand this, we must recall what we said concerning the apprehension of beauty. If we can accept Cardinal Mercier's analysis, an object judged to have what it should have, to be most perfectly what it should be, is delightful and is called beautiful when it is apprehended. A representation, by the very name, should present an object to us again, as it was revealed to the artist, and if it does this well it is beautiful.

The second difficulty concerns the end of representing. It seems unreasonable that many men should spend much time and effort making representations of objects "bene stulta," merely that persons apprehending these objects may be pleased. It would seem that we must demand something more of these objects, for example, that they teach. Now while it may be granted that such objects may teach in their own way, still it is sufficient that they give harmless pleasure. For every

73. In Mat., xi, b.

74. Sum. Theol., I, qu. 39, art. 8, c.

man needs delight; it is absolutely necessary to him. And if he cannot seek harmless delights, he will seek harmful ones.⁷⁵ The "useless" representation, therefore, supplies necessary recreation.

It should be noted, as St. Thomas points out, that man, being a social animal, indulges in recreation with a group rather than by himself. The theater, the concert hall, and the gallery offer tremendous opportunities for men to further their social life, developing a spirit of amity for one another.

The third great difficulty which arises from this theory is that it would seem to demand extreme realism from the representative artist. Mr. Maritain gives his best talent to the consideration of this problem.

The truth is, it is difficult to determine in what precisely this imitation-copy consists, the concept of which seems so clear to minds which have their being in the simplified schemata of the popular imagination.

Is it an imitation or copy of what the thing in itself is and its intelligible type? But this is an object of conception, not of sensation, a thing invisible and intangible, which art, consequently, cannot directly reproduce. Is it the imitation or copy of the sensations produced in us by the thing? But the sensations attain to the consciousness of each one of us only as refracted by an inner atmosphere of memories and emotions, which are, moreover, eternally changing in a flux in which all things become distorted and continually intermingled.⁷⁶

75. Sum. Theol., II-II, qu. 35, art. 4, ad 2um.
76. Maritain, op. cit., p. 150.

The fact of the matter would seem to be this: no artistic representation need be a reduplication or exact copy. The par excellence artistic representation, on the other hand, must cause the sensations and passions that the thing itself would cause if it were present in a determinate set of objective and subjective conditions. The representation is of a constructed phantasm, which may be more or less modified by subjective conditions, and by the conscious intention of the artist, rather than of the thing as it actually is in reality. The lion, which would appear tame and even friendly to one standing in safety, would be represented in a manner which would cause the persons seeing the representation to gain vicariously the experience of one being chased by a hungry lion. The jaws will be increased in size, the beast will become more gaunt, its paws will be larger and its teeth sharper.

On the other hand, the representation must be a real likeness of the represented. This brings up a difficulty concerning the manner in which an accidental unit can be really related to something. Fr. Renard explains the metaphysics of accidental units, and solves the difficulty as follows:

A predicamental relation does not inhere immediately in the substance but only through the medium first of the foundation (quantity, action, passion), and secondly through the medium of another accident resulting from the foundation (*figura forma*).

Now a "per accidens" unit such as a picture,

statue, has its unity from an accidental form (figura forma) which results from the quantity and position or order of parts (situs). Because of this the unity is quantitative, not substantial.

Quantity, however, has this peculiarity, that it individuates itself; it makes, therefore, the picture be this (hoc, non huius). Thence, from this quantitative unit, there results a capacity to individuate any accident (such as relation) which inheres in it, precisely because of its quantity, because of the resulting quantitative figure or form, and not because the subject is a conglomeration of various individual substances.

The relation of a picture or a statue to a man is a real relation. It is one individual relation because it refers the subject in so far as it is one, to the term. It is individualized by the oneness of the quantitative figure or form.

The important thing to remember is that quantity of itself has a certain unity, that it individuates itself and has the capacity to individuate any inhering accident. Let us not forget that such accidents are not the object of experimental science. They are principles of being. The figura or forma of the statue, picture, hence are realities which transcend the object of experimental science. But they are realities, and the relations which inhere in such units are realities which transcend the order of sense knowledge.⁷⁷

77. Renard, (in a personal letter, Jan. 18, 1950).

We hear the slogan, "Art (exists) for art's sake!" Apparently, the implication is that a work, if sufficiently perfect from the point of view of art, may be produced and viewed without any consideration of the moral law. Let us attempt to point out the error in this view.

XI. Art and Prudence

St. Thomas teaches that all things are beautiful, as we have already seen. There is not a doubt that some things, both natural and artificial, are sources of temptation to normal human beings having the use of reason. It is obvious, therefore, that some beautiful things are sources of temptation. Nor is there any point in debating what is to be done with things which are definite sources of temptation: whether an object is especially beautiful or not, we must not allow ourselves to be tempted unnecessarily. It is here for prudence to intervene. Art has no word to say.

The real question here, rather, is to point out the relation between art and prudence as they exist, that is as virtues perfecting the intellect. St. Thomas solves this problem:

...Dicendum quod ratio aliter se habet in artificialibus et aliter in moralibus. In artificialibus enim ratio ordinatur ad finem particularem, quod est aliquid per rationem excogitatum. In moralibus autem ordinatur ad finem communem totius humanae

vitae. Finis autem particularis ordinatur ad finem communem. Cum ergo peccatum sit per deviationem ab ordine ad finem, ut dictum est, in actu artis contingit dupliciter esse peccatum. Uno modo, per deviationem a fine particulari intento ab artifice, et hoc peccatum erit proprium arti; puta si artifex, intendens facere bonum opus, faciat malum, vel intendens malum, faciat bonum. Alio modo per deviationem a fine commune humanae vitae, et hoc modo dicitur peccare, etiam si intendet facere malum opus, et faciat per hoc ut alius decipiatur. Sed hoc peccatum non est proprium artis in quantum artifex est, sed in quantum homo est. Unde ex primo peccato culpatur artifex in quantum artifex, sed ex secundo culpatur homo in quantum homo. — Sed in moralibus, ubi attenditur ordo rationis ad finem communem totius humanae vitae, semper peccatum et malum attenditur per deviationem ab ordine rationis ad finem communem humanae vitae. Et ideo culpatur ex tali peccato homo in quantum homo, et in quantum moralis est. Unde Philosophus dicit in VI Ethicorum, quod "in arte volens peccans est eligibilior; circa prudentiam autem minus", sicut et in virtutibus moralibus, quarum prudentia est directiva.⁷⁸

The point is this: art and prudence are distinct. Their government is mutually independent. Each has its own proper relation to a certain definite end. But the end to which art is related is completely subordinate to the end to which prudence is related. The artist is in no way free from moral restraints, no more in his function as artist than in any other capacity. But he is not bound by the moral law insofar as he is an artist, for this has nothing to do with morality, but insofar as he is a man and subject to the moral law.

The slogan, "Art for art's sake!" has no validity. Art and works of art are for man's sake and man is ordered to

78. Sum. Theol., I-II, qu. 21, art. 2, ad 2um.

beatitude as to his end. Art for art's sake is as unreasonable as sex for sex's sake or food for food's sake.

There is one more fact to be recalled. Art is an imperfect virtue. It needs to be perfected by justice properly disposing the will. An artist who is, as a man, immoral, is not guided by the virtue of justice. Therefore, he will not consistently use well the art which he has. We find this condition widespread in our time.

The self-styled lovers of the beautiful attempt to confuse the spheres of art and prudence. We show that they are distinct in order to indicate the proper place of each.

Et haec dicta sufficient.

Deus, qui Ecclesiam tuam beati Thomae Confessoris
tui mira eruditione clarificas, et sancta o-
peratione foecundas: da nobis, quaesumus;
et quae docuit, intellectu conspicerere,
et quae egit, imitatione complere.
Per Christum Dominum nostrum
Iesum filium tuum, qui te-
cum vivit et regnat in
unitate Spiritus Sanc-
ti, Deus, per om-
nia saecula sae-
culorum. Amen.

(Mass of the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas)

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